The Religious Varieties of Ethnic Presence: A Comparison Between a Taiwanese Immigrant Buddhist Temple and an Evangelical Christian Church

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This study deals with the seeming paradox of why an "other-worldly" Taiwanese immigrant Buddhist temple is more publicly engaged in American society than an "inner-worldly" Taiwanese immigrant Christian church. Based upon an ethnographic study of a Taiwanese immigrant Buddhist temple and an evangelical Christian church, this article shows how a combination of religious ideals, outreach strategies, and representations of racial and religious difference shape their respective types of public engagement. The temple's inner-worldly orientation of Buddhist practice leads it to public interaction through charity while the church's evangelical ideal of exclusive salvation leads it to engagement through personal evangelism. Because of the linguistic and cultural obstacles that immigrants face when evangelizing to those outside their own ethnic community, Buddhist outreach strategies of charity are more culturally transferable to the wider society than evangelical Christian strategies. Furthermore, Buddhists are construed as religious foreigners and face pressures to prove their "American-ness" and engage in acts of public relations that the immigrant Christians do not.

It was the second day of the new millennium, Sunday, January 2, 2000. To inaugurate the beginning of the twenty-first century, Dharma Light Temple, a Chinese Buddhist temple, hosted a "World Peace Day," inviting groups from different religious faiths in the community to share in a ceremony of prayer and blessing. Following the opening welcome delivered by the abess in Mandarin and translated into English, the American national anthem was played, and the American flag was

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1 Pseudonyms have been given to protect the identity of the institutions and individuals referred to in this article.
ceremoniously presented by six Taiwanese men in dark suits and white gloves, and, with proper protocol, raised up the flagpole. With their hands upon their hearts and their amber robes flapping in the wind, three rows of Buddhist monks rose to sing the American national anthem. The crowd, mostly Taiwanese devotees, followed along, humming with the melody, not quite certain of the lyrics. Peppered among the crowd were whites, Latinos, blacks, and other Asians, who had been invited from the local community to come to celebrate and pray for world peace. Facing the crowd on a raised platform were the distinguished guests, religious leaders who represented the diverse religious and racial mosaic of the local community: a white B'ahá'í minister, a Chinese Roman Catholic priest, an Indian Hindu priest, a Japanese Buddhist Church of America bishop, an African American Methodist Episcopal minister, and a Chinese Mormon minister, as well as a Latino schoolboard representative and a white judge. It appeared as if they had covered all possible ethnicities and religions — except for one. Curiously missing were any representatives from one of the largest religious groups in the Taiwanese community, the evangelical Christians.

Less than five miles away from the Dharma Light temple, Grace Taiwanese Church, another Taiwanese immigrant religious group, was in the midst of its first Sunday service of the twenty-first century. The pastor, a tall man dressed in a blue power suit, spoke forcefully from the pulpit about Grace's vision for the new millennium. "Press towards the goal," he urged the congregation, quoting a famous passage from the apostle Paul. "By the year 2010 we aspire for Grace Taiwanese Church to have planted fifty churches around the world." He proceeded to outline how church members would participate in this growth through the "1-2-1" plan — each church member was to bring at least two new people into the church in the year 2000. Banners boldly displaying "press towards the goal" in English and Chinese streamed above the entrances to the sanctuary. The congregation, ranging from teenagers to senior citizens, carefully listened. Some took sermon notes. Others nodded their heads in agreement. Later in the closing prayer the pastor prayed that the church might bring Christ to the local community and that through them others might experience Jesus' salvation, especially given the presence of the Dharma Light temple in such close vicinity. He reminded them of the Great Commission in Acts 1:8\(^2\) where Jesus commanded his disciples to spread the Gospel to the ends of the earth. As twenty-first century disciples they were likewise called to participate in the mission to spread the Gospel around the world. The congregation, however, was homogeneously Taiwanese.

These scenarios shed light on some of the ways that new immigrant religious institutions publicly engage in American society. Dharma Light Temple and Grace Taiwanese Church are both religious institutions serving a predominantly Taiwanese immigrant population in Southern California and both belong to world religions which claim to transcend racial and ethnic boundaries. On the

\(^2\) "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."
face of it, one might expect that of the two, Grace Taiwanese Church would have greater interactions with those outside of their own immigrant religious community. After all, as Protestant Christians, they are not only “inner-worldly,” but also more easily assimilated into the wider American society than Buddhists. Instead, the “other-worldly” Buddhists, whom one would expect to be publicly disengaged and religiously not easily assimilated, extend themselves out to mainstream American society.3

This seeming paradox touches upon a question that is critical to scholars of religion, ethnicity, and migration alike: How do minority groups interact with the larger society? In this case we consider institutions that are guided by distinct religious ideals, Dharma Light Temple and Grace Taiwanese Church, which undoubtedly have different types of interactions with American society. Religions provide unique “maps” of the way the world ought to be and inspire believers to make these ideals a reality. As ethnic immigrants, their interactions with American society are influenced not only by their own limited linguistic and social skills, but also by socially imposed constraints, particularly symbolic constructions of difference and foreignness. As immigrant Taiwanese, both religious communities are deemed racially “other.” However, while the Christians are religiously similar to mainstream America, Buddhists are considered foreigners by virtue of both race and religion. By comparing two Taiwanese immigrant religious institutions — an evangelical Christian church and a Buddhist temple — this article demonstrates not only how particular religious ideals guide public engagement, but also how discourses of religious and racial difference shape an immigrant religious institution’s interactions with the wider society.

RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS AND THE NEW POST-1965 IMMIGRATION

With an increasing number of non-European immigrants since the liberalization of immigration laws in 1965, a growing body of scholarly attention has been given to the religion of these new immigrants (e.g. Warner and Wittner 1998; Yang 1999; Hurh and Kim 1990; Fenton 1988; Min 1992; Christiano 1991). The focus of much of the literature on new immigrant religion, however, has been on the happenings within the religious institution, and little attention has been given to their public presence and relationship to those outside their institutional walls. For example, it has been well-documented that beyond being

3 In his essay, “The social psychology of world religions” (1946a), Weber categorized Protestant sects as inner-worldly, referring to their tendency to be oriented towards the world in “rationalizing the world ethically in accordance with God’s commandments” (291). In contrast, he categorized Buddhists as other-worldly: “On the other hand, the Buddhist monk was also active, but his activities were withdrawn from any consistent rationalization in this world; his question for salvation was ultimately oriented to the flight from the ‘wheel’ of the rebirths” (292).
merely a religious and spiritual resource, immigrant religious institutions often offer a wide array of formal and informal social services facilitating the material, social and psychological adjustment of their members to the United States (Haddad and Lummis 1987; Hurh and Kim 1990; Kashima 1977; Warner and Wittner 1998; Kurien 1998; Leon 1998; Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000).

Much of the literature also speaks to the theme of the immigrant religious institution as an ethnic fortress where immigrants can communally practice, preserve, and pass down their ethnic traditions (Lin 1996; Smith 1978; Warner 1998; Kim 1981; Yang 1999; Hurh and Kim 1990; Min 1992; Williams 1988). Pervasive in all this literature is the recognition that immigrant religious institutions undergo changes and develop new congregational forms as they adapt towards American religious life (Warner and Wittner 1998; Kurien 1998; Numrich 1996; Williams 1988; Abusharaf 1998). As Eastern religions have grown increasingly popular in the United States, some non-Christian immigrant religious institutions have moved to make themselves more accessible to those outside of the ethnic community by, for example, using English (Numrich 1996; Chandler 1998; Yang and Ebaugh 2000; Lin 1996). This literature describes shifts within the institutional walls, such as the development of professionalized clergy, Sunday Schools, and weekly meetings, as "natural" adaptive responses to the American environment, rather than analyzing how these immigrant religions connect to the larger society.4

This lacuna in the literature misses two important aspects of new immigrant religious institutions that my study brings to light. The first is a consideration of how the unique characteristics of post-1965 immigrants, as well as the contemporary racial climate of multiculturalism, shapes the public interactions of immigrant religious congregations. Reflected in much of the pre-1965 immigrant religion literature is the model of the immigrant church as a withdrawn, sheltered enclave that is disengaged from mainstream American society (Handlin 1952; Herberg 1960).5 Not only did pre-1965 immigrants lack the material resources and cultural know-how to participate in mainstream American society, they were further beset by rampant racism and xenophobia. While this

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4 Interpreting "congregationalism" as a natural adaptive process masks the manner in which power imposed from outside the congregation plays into internal congregational decision-making. Here I am referring to power in a Foucauldian and Gramscian sense — the assumptions of power that are embedded in our everyday cultural norms and ways of knowing and being. What may be interpreted as natural processes of assimilation from the outside are regarded as strategic responses from the inside to allay the suspicions of Anglo-Americans of immigrant foreignness and difference. For example, the Japanese-American Buddhist Church of America adopted Protestant forms of worship such as meeting on Sundays, using pews, and having Sunday School to downplay the American perception that they were different and "dangerous" (Kashima 1977; Horinouchi 1973).

5 In this same defensive posture, immigrant religious institutions frequently sponsored schools for the children of immigrants in hopes of curbing the second-generation's exposure to a godless and foreign America (Ernst 1979; Pozzetta 1991).
characterization may be appropriate for the historically-specific, class-bound experiences of most immigrants in pre-1965 America, they do not capture the diversity of experiences of post-1965 immigrants, especially those of the new highly skilled and professional class of immigrants largely from Asia (Ong and Azores 1994; Liu and Cheng, 1994; Fong 1994; Mangiafico 1988; Wong 1987; Zhou 1992; Kim 1981; Hurh and Kim 1984; Min 1996). No longer residing in urban ethnic ghettos, these new immigrants settle in affluent suburbs and come prepared with higher levels of education, income and English skills to make the speedy climb up the American ladder of mobility (Fong 1994; Yang 1999; Chen 1992; Ong and Azores 1994).

Hardly shying away from the American political arena, the new immigrants have also proven themselves to be visibly active in the political system (Saito 1998; Wong 1982). Not only distinct class-wise and educationally from earlier immigrant cohorts, they arrive at a period in America where the racial-ethnic ideal of multiculturalism, rather than the "melting pot," reigns supreme (Glazer and Moynihan 1970; Hollinger 1995). Furthermore, achievements of the Civil Rights movement have inspired immigrants to mobilize around their collective interests and identity (Espiritu 1992). Without neglecting the continuing persistence of racism that immigrants face in American society, it must also be recognized that the climate of multiculturalism minimizes some of the obstacles that difference — racial, ethnic and religious — present to participation in mainstream America, while perhaps simultaneously presenting different obstacles. Specifically regarding the case of post-1965 skilled Asian immigrants,

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6 Clearly not all Asian immigrants are professional and educated. There are an equally representative proportion of Asian immigrants who are unskilled and semi-skilled as well (Liu and Cheng 1994). While the Asian professional and educated class possess the skills for upward mobility, their incomes and professional status are still not commensurate with equally educated Anglos (Barringer, Takeuchi, and Xenos 1990; Der 1993; Chan 1991; Tuan 1998).

7 John M. Liu and Lucie Cheng (1994) make the argument that to protect its interests and to prevent the Soviet Union from gaining the upper hand, the United States invested a great deal in the educational, economic and political infrastructures of post-W.W.II Asia. One of the consequences of this is the rise of a professional middle class who would become the source of skilled and talented immigration to the United States after the liberalization of immigration policies in 1965 (See Committee on the International Migration of Talent 1970; Li 1988; Melendy 1981).

8 In fact, the political participation of Asians is perceived by some to be "too active," as the recent indictment of Chinese immigrants Maria Hua and John Huang in the Democratic campaign finance scandal may suggest. At the Senate Committee's hearings on Al Gore's infamous fund-raising scandal at Hsi Lai Temple, Senator Fred Thompson, chairman of the Senate Panel, told nuns "You are a little more sophisticated than what we might have thought, or else you had some help," suggesting that perhaps as monastics and immigrants the Buddhist nuns should be ignorant about how the American political system really operates.

9 Multiculturalism still has not prevented the rise of anti-immigrant sentiment in places like California. For example, campaigns for California propositions that have been detrimental to the welfare of its immigrants simultaneously appeal rhetorically to ideals of pluralism and multiculturalism. No doubt multiculturalism has increased the level of tolerance for difference in our public institutions. On the other hand, the very ubiquity of its presence is evidenced in the multiple ways that it has been reappropriated, even to the disadvantage of
their class and educational advantages, along with the current multicultural climate of the United States, undoubtedly challenge some of the assumptions of immigrant life based upon immigration of a different historical era. Do their religious institutions continue to play the role of the protective ethnic sanctuary disengaged from the concerns of those outside? Or do they make efforts to reach out?

The second issue to which this paper draws attention is how religious ideals shape the public mission of an immigrant religious institution. Like other associations and institutions within the immigrant community, the religious organization provides a space for communal solidarity through the sharing of resources, symbols and traditions. What differentiates religious institutions from other immigrant institutions is that they consider themselves to be the living embodiment of universal and timeless truths. They are, to use Robert Wuthnow’s term, the “public expression of the sacred” (1994). As such, they carry a certain weight, a gravity of responsibility, that transcends the concerns of their own congregation and extends into visions of how the world ought to be. How these ideas become publicly manifest is as much a theological question as it is a social question.

Sociological literature has addressed how religious ideals inform a congregation’s public presence (Troeltsh 1931; Weber 1946b; Niebuhr 1951; Niebuhr 1929; Wilson 1988; Roozen, McKinney, and Carroll 1988; Wuthnow 1994; Ammerman 1999; Warner 1988). From these a number of competing typologies have been constructed to categorize the different types of communal engagement a congregation might have in the larger society. In addition to theological message, varying factors have been cited as critical determinants, for example, geographic locale, socio-economic class of members, congregational size, authority structure and human and material resources.

For the most part, these congregational typologies have been based upon cases that are both Christian and Anglo-American. Where post-1965 immigrant religious congregations are not Anglo and often not Christian, I argue that these determining factors only partially shed light on the issue. Overlooking these salient characteristics of new immigrant congregations neglects the way that difference, whether it be religious and/or racial, will mediate the sort of presence the religious institution will have in society. Religious institutions operate in a

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those whom it claims to “celebrate.” The argument might even be made that the focus on the cultural aspects of difference only diverts attention from the truly subversive issue of material inequities that continue to persist among different racial groups.

10 Some scholars argue that the experience of Asian and other non-Anglo immigrants does not fit into the assimilation model of white ethnic immigrants because of the racial factor. Where white ethnics eventually could integrate, non-white immigrants became racialized into an “other” category. Despite the fact that some Asians have achieved middle-class suburban aspirations, scholars argue that Asians will be unable to shed their status “foreigners” in the United States (Tuan 1998; Lowe 1996; Kitano and Daniels 1988).
dynamic environment whereby they are responding to a larger social context. Regardless of the intentions of a religious institution, the opportunity to enact these religious ideals in the wider society will depend on the degree of access the public grants them. It is no secret that America has a longstanding tradition of excluding those who are different from the Anglo Protestant ideal (Dinnerstein 1961; Moore 1986; Higham 1988; Kashima 1977; Horinouchi 1973). Today, religious difference continues to be an obstacle for non-Christian groups despite the rhetoric of religious tolerance and multiculturalism. Furthermore, hostility and suspicion from mainstream America may cause immigrant religious groups to temper the zeal for their religious mission.

Using the case studies of two Taiwanese immigrant religious institutions, I will address how religious and social factors shape the public engagement of immigrant religious institutions both inside and outside of the ethnic immigrant community. I suggest that two simultaneous internal and external dynamics influence how an immigrant religious institution interacts with the wider society. First, building upon the sociological literature on congregations, I examine the factors that are internal to the religious institutions: their theological visions and the cultural transferability of the strategies they employ to carry their respective religious missions out into society. Second, I consider the external forces of surrounding racial and religious discourses, specifically the rhetoric of multiculturalism, and how this opens and constrains possibilities for engagement in mainstream society.

METHODS AND SETTING

The data consists of ethnographic fieldwork conducted at Dharma Light Temple and Grace Taiwanese Church between January 1999 and March 2000. Fieldnotes based on participant-observation at church and temple activities were recorded. Furthermore, I conducted fifty-five in-depth interviews with immigrants from both Dharma Light and Grace. Respondents were recruited through snowball sampling. Interviews were also conducted with religious and lay leaders from both communities. Mandarin, Taiwanese and English were used in the interviews.

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11 For example, recently great controversy has arisen regarding the plans for an Arab foundation to convert a church into a mosque in a suburb outside of Chicago. The city council has offered to pay the foundation $200,000 to drop the plans for the mosque. In Wichita, Kansas, residents have attempted to keep a Hindu temple out of their neighborhood. Similarly, in Irvine, California, protests have arisen concerning the building of a synagogue (National Conference for Community and Justice site: http://www.nccj.org).

12 At the temple this included volunteer activities, retreats, summer camp, religious ceremonies, religious education classes, and sutra study meetings. At the church this included Sunday services, Sunday school, Bible study meetings, weekly visitations, retreats and summer camp.
Dharma Light and Grace Church are located in suburban Southern California, an area that has had a high influx of immigration from Taiwan in the 1980s and early 1990s. For example, approximately 20 percent of immigrants from Taiwan to the United States have settled in greater Los Angeles county (Gall and Gall 1991). In highly impacted areas of Los Angeles, ethnic Chinese (primarily from Taiwan, Hong Kong and China) can comprise anywhere from 25 percent to 50 percent of the population (Ong and Azores 1994).

Owing to the generous financial donations of their members and forward-looking leadership of their clergy, Dharma Light and Grace Taiwanese Church have been able to command a significant presence in the Southern California Taiwanese community. Both Dharma Light and Grace are branch locations belonging to larger organizations that have churches and temples located throughout the world and serve a predominantly ethnic Chinese diasporic community, the majority from Taiwan. Both local religious congregations have been in existence for a little over ten years, although their larger institutional affiliations have existed in Southern California for over two decades.

Reflecting the socio-economic status of the Taiwanese immigrant community, members of Dharma Light and Grace Taiwanese Church are similar in length of residency and social class. The men are mostly well-educated and hold at least Bachelor's, if not advanced, degrees. According to the Immigration and Naturalization Service figures from 1997, 64 percent of immigrants from Taiwan hold at least a Bachelor's degree compared to 16.2 percent of the United States population (U.S. Department of Justice 1997). A significant minority of the men are skilled professionals who are concentrated in the science, technology and medical industries and work predominantly outside of the ethnic community. Some, however, have experienced professional downward mobility in the process of immigration and have opted to run small businesses in the ethnic community. Immigrant women predominantly help in the family business or are full-time homemakers. A very small minority work outside the ethnic community. Most immigrants have been in the United States for at least ten years, although some, those with more advanced degrees, have been in the United States for twenty years or more. As a whole, Grace members are slightly more educated and have resided in the United States longer than devotees at Dharma Light.

Most immigrants from Taiwan come to America-with a weak, if any, sense of religious commitment. While popular religion in Taiwan is a mix of Buddhism, Taoism, and folk religion, it is often deemed superstitious and is not seriously practiced by most immigrants, who tend to come from urban areas. Christians in Taiwan now comprise a mere 2 percent, a figure which is declining, but scholars and religious leaders estimate that 24 percent to 32 percent of the Taiwanese immigrant population in the United States are Christian (Chen 1992; Chao 1995; Dart 1977). Reflecting this difference is the high proportion of Grace members who are converts. About 60 percent of Grace members converted to
Christianity in the United States.\textsuperscript{13} Similarly, at Dharma Light Temple, approximately the same proportion of the devotees claim to have become "practicing Buddhists" after immigrating to the United States.\textsuperscript{14} Both religious communities have a high proportion of first-generation Christians and Buddhists, respectively.

**GRACE TAIWANESE CHURCH: SAVING THE WORLD THROUGH EVANGELISM**

*Theological Orientation: A Mission to Evangelize*

Hanging on the church office wall is a map of the world, titled "Status of Global Evangelization," where different regions of the world are color-coded according to the percentage of the population that is Christian. The map is a visible reminder to those at Grace Taiwanese Church of the areas in the world that are still in need of hearing the gospel. Grace flexes its evangelical muscle through an aggressive proselytizing campaign that has resulted in the planting of over forty Grace Taiwanese Church branches in the United States and abroad in its nearly thirty-year existence.

Like other evangelical congregations in the United States, Grace's evangelical orientation is theologically rooted in Jesus Christ's command for the "Great Commission," calling Christians to spread the Gospel "to the end of the earth" (Roozen et al. 1988; Hunter 1983; Smith 1998). Christians have a duty to proselytize as salvation is offered by God only to those who accept Jesus Christ as their personal lord and savior. Through proselytization, evangelicals bring salvation to the world. Evangelicals regard social injustices as consequences of individuals' broken relationships with God (Smith 1998; Hunter 1987). The corrective to this problem is reconciling this relationship by making Jesus Christ the head of one's life. This can only be done through conversion, or becoming "born again." As only Christians hold these exclusive keys to salvation their mission to evangelize is ever more critical.

While Jesus Christ's words are certainly to be universally applied, Grace Taiwanese Church practices a selective evangelism as it sees its special mission to evangelize to the Taiwanese and Mandarin-speaking population of the world. And judging from numbers, it seems that Grace Taiwanese Church and other like-minded evangelical Christian organizations have been quite successful in this mission.

\textsuperscript{13} This figure is based upon the estimates of Grace Taiwanese Church pastors and church leaders.

\textsuperscript{14} This figure is based upon my own observations and the estimates of Dharma Light leaders.
Institutionalizing a Strategy of Personal Evangelism

In its public mission to evangelize, Grace's most important resource is its members, who do the evangelizing. Like other religious groups who successfully recruit new members (Stark and Bainbridge 1980; Bainbridge and Stark 1981), the key to Grace Taiwanese Church's evangelization strategy is personal networks and friendships. The "1-2-1" strategy mentioned in the introduction to this piece not only indicates that each person should bring two new people to Grace, but that effective evangelism is based on personal "one to one" relationships. In this environment, evangelization becomes expected, as is evidenced in one respondent's remarks:

You also have to understand that the Buddhists don't evangelize like we Christians. They talk about having a good heart and doing good deeds. That's it. I feel like they provide good guidelines for living like don't do things that hurt others, be a good person. That's it. It's not like Christianity where we are supposed to be good people already, and on top of that share the good news.

All of the Christian respondents that I interviewed told me that they converted to Christianity because they were initially introduced to Grace through friends. Visitors are often encouraged to attend Friday night small-group Bible study meetings or other church social events rather than the Sunday service. These smaller, more intimate, settings are conducive towards meeting others and developing friendships. To attract non-Christians, Grace will frequently sponsor lectures dealing with practical life issues that are of interest to the general population, rather than explicitly religious issues. Popular lectures often feature a professional psychologist who speaks on issues such as dealing with relationships between husband and wife, or parent and child.\(^{15}\)

Furthermore, Grace Taiwanese Church employs social activities such as ski trips and camping as opportunities to attract non-Christians and share the Gospel with them. Many of the respondents commented that while they initially may not have been interested in Christianity, they continued coming to Grace Taiwanese Church because of the friendly persistence of the members. This was the case even among those respondents who were also at the time regularly attending a Buddhist temple. In contrast, those who were attending a Buddhist temple said that no one there made efforts to reach out to them and that they made very few friends there.

Grace uses several strategies to institutionalize evangelism. At baptism individuals are asked not only if they believe the central tenets of the Christian faith, but also to promise to share their faith with those who are not yet Christian. Pastors and lay leaders are constantly urging church members to bring

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\(^{15}\) James Davison Hunter (1982, 1983, 1991) has pointed out that this concern for issues dealing with psychology and family is shared among many American conservative Christians.
more friends and create goal-oriented slogans such as "1-2-1" to remind the congregation of the larger Grace Taiwanese Church vision. Another common technique is to have members make commitments or vows to evangelize to a certain number of people or to a certain group within a specified time period. In so doing, Grace cultivates in its members the expectation and obligation to evangelize.

To incorporate new membership, the congregation has a "welcome group" or "caring group" which is in charge of welcoming and "following up" on newcomers. One of the church leaders told me the following about welcoming procedures:

There's a caring group and there's a caring group leader. We have people assigned to care for that person. Of course when we assign we try not to make the person feel like it's just a formality. That person will call the newcomer. We try to make friends with that person. That's the right intention to have when you try to care for somebody... everybody has to be in a caring group at some point and you take turns.

During services, Grace creates opportunities for conversion through altar calls, which immediately follow the sermon. In my observations at the church, there was never an altar call that went unheeded. When someone comes forward for the altar call, they are always accompanied by friends or "welcome group members" who kneel with them on the floor and pray with them. Those in the welcome group are trained especially to minister to new converts by leading them through the "Sinner's Prayer" and praying for them. New converts learn about the Christian faith through a special class that leads them towards baptism. Those who eventually become baptized are required to give a public testimony. In this environment conversion becomes expected and regular rather than extraordinary — so much so that the testimonies and baptism have become too time consuming in regular Sunday services and have been moved to a separate afternoon service that happens a few times a year.

Consequences of Evangelistic Theology and Strategy

Grace is highly visible in the ethnic community but has very limited interactions with those outside. Two important internal factors shape its public engagement. The first is its evangelical theological orientation which prioritizes public engagement through evangelization. The second is its resources and strategies for outreach. While Grace does not have an explicit agenda of racial

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16 The Sinner's Prayer is as follows: Dear God, I confess that I am a sinner and I am sorry for all the wrongs that I have done. I believe that your Son, Jesus Christ, died on the cross for my sins. Please forgive me and I invite you, Jesus, to come into my heart and life as Lord and Savior. I commit and trust my life to you. Thank you for dying for my sins, for your free pardon, for your gift of eternal life, and for hearing and answering my prayer. Amen.
or ethnic exclusion, its strategies for evangelism have had ethnic and racial consequences and have limited its interactions with those outside of the Chinese-speaking community. First, the personal evangelism strategy tends to limit outreach to members’ personal networks. As Taiwanese immigrants in a heavily populated Taiwanese immigrant locale, most of their friends are Taiwanese like themselves. This leads to the reproduction of the existing ethnic and class proportions of the church. Second, as immigrants, many do not possess the linguistic or social skills to reach out to the non-Taiwanese or Mandarin speaking. The personal evangelism model is based on first developing a friendship and then leading the person to Christ. Lacking in cultural transferability, this strategy limits engagement to that population whom members have the social and linguistic skills to befriend. 17 Even among those who speak fluent English, there always remains a sense of cultural disconnection between themselves and non-Chinese that prevents them from developing relationships beyond the acquaintance level. In this sense, Grace’s most valuable resource for outreach, its members, is simultaneously an obstacle that hinders it from outreach beyond the ethnic immigrant community.

Logically they limit their evangelism to those who can fit into their community — those who are ethnic-linguistically similar. When asked whether the church should open itself up to those of different ethnic groups, the respondents uniformly replied that while this might be possible with the English-speaking second-generation congregation, this would certainly be impossible and even unnecessary with the immigrant congregation. They reasoned that it was not a matter of active exclusion, but that since they had defined themselves as a Taiwanese and Mandarin speaking community it was impossible to accommodate to other linguistic groups. A typical response is as follows:

_It doesn’t matter what race you are. If you understand Taiwanese or Mandarin you’re welcome. It’s not like we can say, ‘oh you’re from Hong Kong, we have to speak Cantonese for you, or you’re Mexican and we have to speak Spanish.’ We can’t accommodate to all of them. So it’s not that we don’t welcome them, it’s just if they can understand our language they are welcome to come._

To conduct outreach only to a Taiwanese and Mandarin-speaking population does not contradict the universal injunction of Jesus Christ to evangelize to the world. In fact they are being most faithful to this call by strategically evangelizing those with whom they can most effectively share the Gospel. Ironically, the combination of evangelical mission and linguistically-specific outreach strategies make Grace highly active in the ethnic community. However, these same factors limit it from extending its religious mission to mainstream America.

17 Daniel V. A. Olson (1989) comes to a similar conclusion that the same forces which may create a tightly-knit congregation can limit its potential for growth in membership.
DHARMA LIGHT TEMPLE: CHARITABLE ENGAGEMENT

Theological Orientation: A Mission of Charity

Despite Weber's categorization of Buddhism as "other-worldly" and withdrawn from the affairs of the world, Dharma Light practices a particular brand of "inner-worldly" Buddhism that it calls "Involved Buddhism," a Buddhism that is highly involved in the human world. Involved Buddhism is the outgrowth of a larger reform movement in Chinese Mahayana Buddhism that was started in China fifty years ago by the monk Venerable Taixu. Where Buddhism in Taiwan was traditionally perceived by the public as superstitious and primarily a medium for praying for the dead, Involved Buddhism is oriented towards individual practice through daily living. Instead of "escaping the world" as Weber claims (1946a: 291), Involved Buddhism teaches that one truly practices Buddhism by living fully in this world. This is evidenced in a saying from Venerable Taixu, "When you become fully human, you will become a Buddha. That is the living meaning of truth."18

Underlying the Buddhist practice of charity is a radically different understanding of "salvation" than evangelical Christianity. Buddhists believe that beings operate in a continual cycle of rebirth whereby one's karma, the culmination of one's actions and deeds, determines the form of one's future life. Salvation for the Buddhist is attaining nirvana, or freedom from the karmic cycle of rebirth altogether. In the state of nirvana one is finally liberated from the illusions of the self and its attachments to this world, which are the ultimate causes of suffering. One works towards attaining nirvana by re-orienting one's thoughts and actions. Through practices of meditation and chanting one learns to empty the mind of illusory thoughts. Through acts of self-giving or charity, one loses the illusion of the separateness of the self.

For those who do not see attaining nirvana in this life as a reality, the more immediate goal is to at least secure rebirth into a higher realm of being. By doing good, one cultivates merit and works towards the assurance of rebirth into a higher realm. By doing bad things in this life one will earn rebirth into a lower realm. One can also accumulate merit through participation in Buddhist rituals and practice.20 Belonging to the Pure Land tradition of Buddhism, most

18 Involved Buddhism's "inner-worldly" orientation is not unique to only Chinese Buddhism but is mirrored in contemporary Buddhist movements around the world. For example, see the writings of Thich Nhat Hanh who calls for an "engaged Buddhism" that is quite similar to Involved Buddhism. For scholarly accounts of socially engaged Buddhism see C. S. Queen and S. King, eds., 1996.

19 According to an authority at the Dharma Light Temple, this is a quote passed down through popular oral tradition.

20 For example, in the Pure Land tradition a common practice is the recitation of Amitabha Buddha's name.
devotees at Dharma Light aspire towards rebirth in Amitabha Buddha's Pure Land, a realm believed to be more conducive towards the attainment of enlightenment.

Given the nature of their salvation message, Buddhists have a very different orientation to the world than evangelical Christians. Buddhists regard the world and their present lives as a temporary realm where they work out their karmic debts and merits. Buddhists may be concerned about propagating the Dharma but they rarely consider it to be their primary mission in the world. Furthermore, because Buddhists believe that individuals have multiple lifetimes to reach enlightenment, there is less urgency to evangelize. Like Christian religious institutions, the temple exists primarily to serve its own community of devotees. As an institution of salvation it offers both the education and ritual services that connect the individual to that which is transcendent and facilitates the cultivation of merit. To the extent that a temple, or a church for that matter, focuses all of its energies on the maintenance of its own community, its engagement with those outside will be limited. But where a temple does extend itself beyond its own community, the world is a place where individuals can work out their own salvation through good thoughts and deeds. Through such acts of charity, Buddhists work for the "salvation" of themselves and others.

Dharma Light's particular practice of Involved Buddhism has challenged the temple's traditional institutional role of merely offering sacred ritual and ceremony, expanding its concerns beyond the temple walls to those of public service and charity. As an institution of salvation which sees its orientation as this life rather than the next, Dharma Light proclaims its public mission to "establish a Pure Land on earth" through the dual process of physically transforming the world through charity and promoting internal purification through Buddhist teachings. Where traditionally the Pure Land is considered a realm one enters after this life, Dharma Light insists that we can establish the Pure Land in the here and now. While giving visitors a tour of the temple, one of the monastics explained to visitors, "We don't just sit in the forest to meditate; to isolate ourselves for our own religious practice would be selfish. We want to be involved in society." Like Grace Taiwanese Church, Dharma Light is also concerned about propagating its own religious message. However, this is not the sole mission of the temple or its devotees. In Taiwan and around the world, the Dharma Light order has made every attempt to engage its temples in the local community through charity and public service. In its mission statement, one of Dharma Light's expressed objectives is "to benefit society through charitable programs." For example, Dharma Light has been involved in local prison outreach, gang intervention, and charitable fund drives with the larger American society. While it was rare for the evangelical pastors to voice concern for worldly affairs that did not affect the church community, it was not uncommon for monastics to pray for events remote from Southern California, such as the war in Kosovo or the shootings at Columbine High School. It even
held a special service in October 1996 to honor the servicemen killed in a fire on the Navy carrier USS Oriskany.

Cultivating a Culture of Charity

Just as Grace Taiwanese Church attempts to cultivate an institutional culture of evangelism, Dharma Light attempts to cultivate an institutional culture of charity. To encourage its devotees towards greater charity in 1999, Dharma Light promoted the theme “Three Good Movements,” referring to “say good words, have a good heart, and do good things.” Walking through the temple grounds, it is impossible not to notice all of the Dharma Light volunteers in their purple-vested uniforms who are attempting to put the “three good movements” into practice. In fact, at times it seems that there are more volunteers than devotees at the temple. Some are giving tours, some are sweeping the grounds, others are answering phones, working in the kitchen, managing the parking lot or running the gift shop. Dharma Light takes volunteering seriously and volunteers must go through a requisite training course. Furthermore, while volunteering activities might appear to be casual and fun, volunteers are hardworking and diligent in attending to their tasks. Their reasons for volunteering are multiple. Some come for social reasons, others come because they have the leisure time. Some have even admitted that they come for the vegetarian food. Whether consciously articulated or not, devotees associate volunteering with doing good and the accumulation of merit. Volunteering is mutually beneficial for both the temple and the devotee. For the temple, the presence of a readily available, trained volunteer corps is both cost-effective and convenient. At the same time, to the volunteer it offers opportunities for spiritual enhancement and merit cultivation.

Just as Grace Taiwanese Church becomes an institution of salvation through preaching the gospel, Dharma Light becomes an institution of salvation by giving its devotees the opportunity to do good. It is no longer solely through ritual and ceremony that one cultivates merit, but also through actions in one’s practical daily life. Dharma Light extends this charity outside of its temple walls to engage in the world. Having cultivated a culture of charity, Dharma Light is able to mobilize this readily available volunteer corps to direct acts of charity towards the public. For example, when the temple wanted to organize a disaster relief for the victims of Hurricane Mitch, the human apparatus was already in place for a timely and effective response. In a culture where good deeds are a moral imperative, people are quite willing to donate their time and money for the cause, not only within the Taiwanese immigrant community but also the larger local community.
Interreligious dialogue and cooperation

Another important way in which Dharma Light performs good deeds in the world is through interreligious dialogue and cooperation. Dharma Light regards the cultivation of respect and communication between different religious groups as important steps towards world peace. Sponsoring the annual "World Peace Day" and inviting leaders from different religious traditions is one example of Dharma Light initiating interreligious cooperation. In Taiwan, the Dharma Light order has frequently been the initiator of Buddhist-Catholic dialogues. The Dharma Light Temple participates in monthly Roman Catholic-Buddhist dialogues with local Buddhist and Catholic religious leaders. In addition, Dharma Light enjoys a friendly relationship with a local African American Methodist Episcopal Church. Dharma Light monks and the AME gospel choir have performed at each other's communities. Both the temple and church have collaborated in a charity drive in the local area.

Consequences of Theological Orientation and Strategies

Whereas the evangelical mode of engagement through personal evangelism limits the immigrant Taiwanese church's sphere of interaction to other Taiwanese and Mandarin-speaking populations, the Buddhist practice of charity is more easily extended towards other populations. The Taiwanese church's engagement is more selective because they go out into the world to incorporate others into their own linguistically-specific community. In contrast, practicing charity allows for the possibility of more interactions with mainstream America because it does not require the linguistic and social skills that personal evangelizing does. Dharma Light's practices of charity and public service outside of the temple rarely involve extensive interactions between the lay immigrant population and the recipients of the charity. Most of the acts of generosity are in the form of donations of money or material necessities that are first gathered within the temple. Donations do not require a great deal of interaction with the larger American public. Furthermore, it is a select group of lay and monastic representatives of the temple who present the donations to the receiving party. On the other hand, with the evangelicals, it is not church representatives who engage with the world, but each lay individual is expected to be a public spokesperson for the faith. While this sort of personal and relationship-based engagement may allow for deeper and more substantial individual transformation of the world, given the linguistic and cultural resources of the immigrant population, this strategy limits the extent of its interactions with mainstream America.21

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21 The literature on evangelical Christians shows that in general they are more concerned about individual transformation rather than social transformation. Taiwanese immigrant evangelicals are similar to other American evangelicals in emphasizing the role of evangelization. However, on social issues such as
Secondly, Dharma Light has more contact with those outside of the Taiwanese immigrant community because of its concern for interreligious dialogue and cooperation. While Dharma Light does not actively seek to promote interracial dialogue, its active mission to establish world peace through interreligious dialogue inadvertently promotes interracial interactions as well. For example, in his 1998 year end message, the Dharma Light Master did not fail to mention that he had visited prominent Catholic and Muslim religious leaders at the Vatican and in Malaysia, respectively. The stated significance of these visits in the newsletter is explicitly religious, "We had a religious dialogue that went beyond the century. In fact world peace is not just a dream. If everyone could understand that all beings are one, and if we know how to be respectful and tolerant, then this human world will be filled with joy and harmony. There would be no war and no injustice." While motivated by religious ideals, the racial and ethnic implications are clear: a Chinese monk having conversations with a white Roman Catholic and a Southeast Asian Muslim demonstrates that world peace will be achieved through the cooperation of not only different religions, but different racial and ethnic groups as well. Particularly in the racially and religiously plural population of the United States, one cannot have interreligious dialogue without at the same time engaging other racial and ethnic groups. In comparison, because Grace Taiwanese Church regards Christian salvation as exclusive, it feels no need to interact with other religious groups, and in effect limits its potential interaction with other racial and ethnic groups.

GETTING ON THE INSIDE BY BEING ON THE OUTSIDE: CHRISTIANS AS RELIGIOUS INSIDERS AND BUDDHISTS AS RELIGIOUS OUTSIDERS

Internal factors such as salvation mission, resources and strategies shed only partial light on the way that immigrant religious institutions negotiate their public presence in society. External factors and social context need to be taken into account. In the case of Dharma Light and Grace Church, both are located in the same west coast suburb and serve a Chinese immigrant population primarily from Taiwan, and both have members of similar socio-economic background. They differ in how the respective religious ideals of evangelical Christianity and Buddhism inform distinct types of public engagement. But they also differ in how mainstream America perceives and receives a Taiwanese Buddhist temple versus a Taiwanese Christian church. Immigrant religious institutions, and all religious institutions for that matter, are guided not only by their religiously-defined missions, but are shaped by the dynamic interaction with abortion and school prayer where American evangelicals have traditionally taken public action, Taiwanese immigrant evangelicals have not. Cultural and linguistic barriers have been significant obstacles to Taiwanese immigrant evangelical participation in the American public in this manner.
their surrounding religious and social environment. Where the religious group is
theologically inclined towards social engagement, I suggest that ironically it is
the presence of religious difference that encourages greater engagement in
mainstream America.22

The disengagement of Taiwanese Christian churches from mainstream
American society is reinforced by the fact that in the minds of most Americans,
the association of Chinese with Christianity is incongruous and does not fit into
typical religio-racial categorization. By not being “sufficiently foreign” as most
Americans might expect, the Taiwanese Christian churches are overlooked and
rendered nearly invisible. While immigrant churches might advertise themselves
to the American public as ethnic institutions, the lack of distinction between
the architecture of their buildings and any other Christian church makes them
easily overlooked.

On the other hand, the oriental exoticism of the Buddhist temple captures
the attention of most Americans and fits into the American imagination of what
is Chinese. In the categories of American representation, Dharma Light
symbolically represents what is Chinese more adequately than does Grace
Taiwanese Church. Being a symbol of difference, Dharma Light must navigate
within a dense forest of competing discourses advocating religious pluralism on
the one hand and Christian hegemony on the other. The temple, a massive
structure built in traditional Chinese architecture, faced severe obstacles from
the local community in gaining permission for its construction. When
arguments were raised by the local community that the temple would devalue
the local property or cause obstructing traffic, both members of the local com-
munity and Dharma Light devotees confided to me that these masked the
underlying concern for the imposing presence of a non-Christian community in
the town. Other arguments stemmed from misunderstandings of Buddhism, such
as the unfounded fear of animal sacrifices or local residents’ worries that their
children would be entrapped by a “religious cult.”

Sensing the antagonism from the local community, Dharma Light leaders
have taken extra steps to befriend local organizations and to quell any
perception of threat. In an interview with the local press the temple Abbot posed
the question “What can we do to get the support of the American people?” He
promised that the temple would be open for use by the community, including
non-Buddhist groups, as well as be a site for running charitable programs. To
build a positive image the temple holds an annual “Get to Know Your
Neighbors” Banquet where they invite representatives from local organizations

22 The presence of religious difference alone will not necessarily encourage engagement with
mainstream America unless there exists a theologically-oriented foundation towards public engagement. For
example, in the vicinity of Dharma Light and Grace Church there are other Taiwanese Buddhist temples
whose presence do not extend beyond the ethnic immigrant community despite being “religiously different.”
Unlike Dharma Light, their missions are primarily to serve the existing temple community through religious
education and ritual ceremony rather than through the social services as forwarded by Involved Buddhism.
and businesses to acquaint them with the temple community. Numerous photographs of non-Chinese people at temple events are proudly displayed in the temple’s monthly newsletters and publications, suggesting that they are receptive to Americans. An American flag is not raised in the immigrant Christian church however it is conspicuously present in the temple courtyard leading to the main Buddha hall. Dharma Light is also a frequent financial sponsor of local public events, such as free concerts in the park. In contrast, the immigrant Christian churches do not make the effort to participate in local charity events.

At the same time that their religious difference prevents Dharma Light from being truly “American,” in the age of multiculturalism, the presence of “just enough difference” becomes the ticket to recognition and possible acceptance. By virtue of the association of Buddhism with the Far East and Christianity with the West, the Buddhists, rather than the Christians, are the ones to be recruited and courted as the Chinese representatives at the multicultural table. Since more Taiwanese immigrants regularly attend a Christian church than regularly visit the temple, the church would be the more effective venue of the two for political campaigning. However, when local politicians want to court the vote of the Chinese immigrant population or publicize their multicultural platform, photographs with temple monastics are at a premium because the Buddhists are the symbolic representatives for the Chinese immigrant population. Indeed, the temple and local politicians share a symbiotic relationship whereby non-Chinese use the temple to gain the favor of the Chinese immigrant population and the temple uses the attention by local leaders and figures to gain acceptance into mainstream America. From the vantage point of those at Dharma Light, mainstream American society sends two seemingly conflicting sets of undercurrent messages. On the one hand there is the pressure they feel to conform to American society, and on the other hand is the message to “stay Chinese.” Many Taiwanese Buddhists relayed to me how they are frequently pressured by Taiwanese Christians to convert whereas the Anglo Christians are the ones who encourage them to stay Buddhist.

Ironically, because of the public perception of religious difference, those at Dharma Light feel the need to engage in mainstream American society to bargain for acceptance. Having been labeled as different, Dharma Light’s acts of charity are simultaneously marks of “cultural citizenship” that are no different from the philanthropic extravagance that has been demonstrated by other new Asian immigrant tycoons to high culture institutions (Ong 1999). To interpret Dharma Light’s acts of charity as simply a “natural” process of assimilation into American society misses the point that their public presence is shaped by the stigma of difference and the struggle to find acceptance. Ironically, on the other hand, in an historical era where multiculturalism has taken the moral high ground, those at Dharma Light are courted by mainstream America solely on the basis of their “difference.” In comparison, as a Christian institution, Grace Taiwanese Church does not have the burden to engage in public relations work.
among mainstream Americans to prove its American-ness. But not being perceived "different enough," neither are they invited to participate in mainstream multiculturalism.

CONCLUSION

At the outset of this paper I presented two scenarios of what would appear to be a Weberian paradox — the fact that of two immigrant religious institutions an "other-worldly" Buddhist temple is more publicly engaged in mainstream American society than an "inner-worldly" evangelical Christian church. I have attempted to explain this seeming contradiction by focusing on the religious ideals which drive their public missions, the strategies they employ, and the social context in which these ideals are enacted. I demonstrate that indeed both groups are inner-worldly in that they see this world as a place to work for salvation. Grace's evangelical interpretation of salvation drives it to engage in the world through personal evangelism. In contrast to Weber's characterization of Buddhism as a "flight from the world," Dharma Light's interpretation of Involved Buddhism is an example of an inner-worldly Buddhism that advocates for the path to enlightenment both through contemplation and acts of charity.

Common to the case of all immigrant institutions, both Dharma Light and Grace face similar cultural and linguistic obstacles in enacting their religious mission outside of the ethnic community. However, unique to the cases of Dharma Light and Grace are the historically-specific opportunities and constraints on public action that multiculturalism presents in American society today. Where Dharma Light could have limited its outreach to the ethnic community like Grace, or to the homeland, like the mainline Taiwanese church, it chooses to extend its public mission outside of the ethnic community. Herein lies the critical factor of Dharma Light's status as a religious outsider compared to Grace's status as a religious insider. Representations of religious and racial difference as well as discourses of multiculturalism combine forces to pressure Buddhists, as religious outsiders, to engage in acts of public relations to both prove their Americanness and yet remain representative Chinese. As a Christian institution, Grace is regarded with less suspicion, yet loses some of its exotic appeal to mainstream America. But clearly not all ethnic Buddhist temples are publicly engaged to the extent of Dharma Light Temple. Where other Chinese Buddhist temples might face similar pressures, these do not produce the same outcomes of involvement with mainstream America. What they lack and what Dharma Light possesses is a mission that is culturally transferable to the American public. In this sense Dharma Light is also more strategically advantageous than Grace in extending its mission beyond the ethnic community.

While the cases I present are specific in religious orientation and social context, the implications can be extended to understand more generally how ethnic religious institutions interact with the larger American public. In regard
to racial and religious minority groups, one needs to consider not only how religious ideals inform public engagement, but how the cultural transferability of their outreach strategies, as well as surrounding discourses and representations of difference shape the public expressions of their theology.

REFERENCES


