The Paracultural Imaginary:

Cultural Appropriation, Heterophily and the Diffusion of

Religious/Spiritual Traditions in Intercultural Communication

by

Terrie Siang-Ting Wong

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Graduate Supervisory Committee:

Sarah Amira de la Garza, Co-Chair
Eric Margolis, Co-Chair
Megha Budruk
Vivian Hsueh-Hua Chen

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ABSTRACT

Buddhism is thriving in US-America, attracting many converts with college and post-graduate degrees as well as selling all forms of popular culture. Yet little is known about the communication dynamics behind the diffusion of Buddhist religious/spiritual traditions into the United States. Religion is an underexplored area of intercultural communication studies (Nakayama & Halualani, 2010) and this study meets the lacuna in critical intercultural communication scholarship by investigating the communication practices of US-Americans adopting Asian Buddhist religious/spiritual traditions.

Ethnographic observations were conducted at events where US-Americans gathered to learn about and practice Buddhist religious/spiritual traditions. In addition, interviews were conducted with US-Americans who were both learning and teaching Buddhism. The grounded theory method was used for data analysis.

The findings of this study describe an emerging theory of the paracultural imaginary -- the space of imagining that one could be better than who one was today by taking on the cultural vestments of (an)Other. The embodied communication dynamics of intercultural exchange that take place when individuals adopt the rituals and philosophies of a foreign culture are described. In addition, a self-reflexive narrative of my struggle with the silence of witnessing the paracultural imaginary is weaved into the analysis.

The findings from this study extend critical theorizing on cultural identity, performativity, and cultural appropriation in the diffusion of traditions between cultural groups. In addition, the study addresses the complexity of speaking out against the subtle prejudices in encountered in intercultural communication.

DEDICATION

The American writer Elbert Hubbard once said: "He who does not understand your silence will probably not understand your words." This text is dedicated to those who understand both my silence and my words.

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INTRODUCTION

"Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter"

- Martin Luther King Jr.

"Doesn't *mala* mean wreath in *Pali*[1]?" asks Paul, a recent Buddhist enthusiast who has been to the temple frequently for the last couple of months. A long pause. Leonard the meditation teacher asks Paul if he would repeat his question. "Doesn't mala mean wreath or rosary in *Pali*?" Leonard smiles but does not reply.

The white-Caucasian[2] American students in the Buddhist meditation class wait for Leonard to respond. Leonard, the white-Caucasian American Buddhist teacher, sits across from the students in silence. Next to Leonard, also facing the students, is Bhante the resident Sri Lankan monk. Bhante's role in the group is to sing the Buddhist mantras in the Pali language at the end of each meditation session. He is trained in the Sri Lankan Theravada Buddhist religious/spiritual tradition. Yet, upon hearing this basic question on Pali terminology, Bhante sits in the room silently with downcast eyes and a serene smile.

Sitting amongst the white-Caucasian American students, I was not certain about the meaning of the term "mala" but I had some thoughts on how to answer that question given my background. I had recited Buddhist mantras in the Pali language for nine months when I was in Singapore, prior coming to the United States for graduate school.

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[1] The Pali language is primarily used in Buddhist scriptures from the Sri Lankan Theravada Buddhist religious/spiritual tradition. This language is not widely used in other cultures or spoken in other settings.
[2] Research on the phenomenon of whiteness indicate that white-Americans most identify with the terms "White" and "Caucasian" when referring to their ethnicity (Martin, Krizek, Nakayama, & Bradford, 1995; Nakayama & Krizek, 1995). Therefore, I refer to white Americans as white-Caucasian Americans.

In addition, I had taken a class on Buddhism in Singapore, taught by a householder who was trained in the Sri Lankan Theravada tradition. Yet, like Bhante, I sat amongst the white-Caucasian Americans in the room in silence.

Given that Bhante's primary responsibility in the meditation class was to sing Buddhist mantras in the Pali language, one would think that either Paul or Leonard would invite Bhante to give a response when they had a question on Buddhist religion/ spirituality. Oddly however, Paul did not direct his question to Bhante even when no answer was forthcoming from Leonard. Even more odd was how Leonard the Buddhist teacher also chose to keep silent instead of addressing Bhante. In that moment, it was as if all the white-Caucasian Americans in the room suddenly did not see the expert on Buddhist religion/spirituality sitting across from them. It was as if Bhante became invisible although he stood out visually in his bright saffron robes and shaved head.

There was only silence in the scene.

The texture of this silence is like a dark and viscous sludge. I touch this silence every time I reflect on the scene described above. The silence is like a leech attached to my throat. It itches to be peeled away but instead, I sink into its cool gooeyness. The silence sucks at me, sticks to me, and I feel strangely attracted towards drowning into the sludge of voicelessness. There is a sense of comfort in staying buried under the silence. There is inertia against pulling off the silence to see what is underneath. There is something oddly familiar about to wanting to stay invisible as a cultural being during such intercultural situations. There is childish hopefulness that if I stay in the silence, I will not have to meet with the dark side of intercultural communication.

Spivak (1988) says that the subaltern does not speak because that which needs to be spoken must be done in the codes of the dominant culture. The subaltern has limited or no access to the dominant culture and so the subaltern cannot speak. But why is the subaltern still unable to speak when asked about the codes of its own culture? What keeps the subaltern[3] silent then? And what happens when we convert the silences in these spaces of difference (de Kock, 1992) in intercultural interactions into speech?

Recent works in communication studies have moved to complicate the relationship between silence and power by considering silence as a space of possibility (see e.g., the collection of editted works in Malhotra & Carrillo Rowe, 2013). However, traditionally, to be silent and inarticulate in the United States is a sign powerlessness and oppression (for a discussion on silence and powerlessness, see e.g., Wall & Gannon-Leary, 1999). In this reporting of my dissertation project, I read between the lines of intercultural conversation to hear silence as oppression and powerlessness. My analysis speaks to that which is muted in intercultural exchange in the context of the diffusion of cultural traditions between cultural groups in the domain of religion/spirituality.

True intercultural communication will never take place when there are power differences between the cultural groups in conversation such that they do not interact as equals (Asante, 2008). To speak of the power differentials and the asymmetries in intercultural relationships is also to speak of the oppressions that take place when one operates with a hierarchical worldview where the voice and presence of some cultural groups is more privileged than others (see Gonzalez, 1998 for a discussion on voice and

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[3] The term *subaltern* has been widely misused as an all-encompassing label for "the oppressed." Here, I follow Spivak to use the term "subaltern" to refer to "the people, the foreign elite, the indigenous elite, the upwardly mobile indigenes in various kinds of situations… a space of difference" (see de Kock, 1992, p. 45 for full transcript of Spivak's interview at the New Nation Writers Conference in South Africa)

hegemony). There are many forms of prejudice that take place in human communication (see e.g., the collected works in Hecht, 1998 for an in-depth discussion). This dissertation articulates the subtle prejudices and hidden power relations that lay beneath the embodied communication dynamics of intercultural exchange in the diffusion of religious/spiritual traditions between cultural groups.

Religion/Spirituality in Intercultural Communication

There is much communication research on the diffusion of innovation (E. Rogers, 1995) between cultures in the domains of agriculture (see e.g., Lionberger, 1960; Ryan & Gross, 1943), public health (Becker, 1970) and telecommunication (Ling, 2002). There is, in contrast, a paucity of research within intercultural communication literature on the transfer of philosophies and practices between cultures in the domain of religion/ spirituality. Nakayama and Halualani (2010) argue that religion has remained an unexplored area of intercultural communication scholarship because "religion is difficult to discuss and even more difficult to analyze from the tools that we currently have as academics" (p. 599). They urge critical intercultural communication scholars to develop research that increases the understanding of intercultural exchange in the domain of religion/spirituality as well as to devise a new vocabulary for engaging with religion.

To date, only two communication scholars have conducted empirical research on the adoption of religion/spirituality by individuals from a different culture. De la Garza (writing as González, 1997) published a collection of ethnographic poetry on the white-Caucasian American appropriation of Native American spiritual traditions. Roberts (2003) conducted a rhetorical analysis of the white-Caucasian American appropriation of Native American *pow-wows*.

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In terms of the overall domain of religion/spirituality and its relationship to communication, to date, several communication scholars have written on this topic — Bhawuk's (2003) case studies on creativity in Indian spiritual traditions, Cheong's (Cheong, Huang, & Poon, 2011; Cheong & Poon, 2009) research on online Christian communities, de la Garza's work on the Four Seasons of Ethnography (first published as González, 1990), and Miike's (2007a, 2007b, 2008) work on Asiacentricity. This dissertation project contributes to this small but growing body of literature within communication studies that touches on the domain of religion/spirituality.

In *Painting the White face Red*, de la Garza (writing as González, 1997) theorizes on the process of identity-shaping through the sharing of spirituality where white-Caucasian American persons reject the cultural values and lifestyles that they were brought up in so as to live in accordance to the Native American spiritual traditions. Using axiomatic poetry developed from ethnographic data, de la Garza (1997) shows the dialectic tension of the "positive and the negative, the strong and the weak, the admirable and the shameful, as it existed in the real experience" (p. 488) in interactions between Native Americans and white-Caucasian Americans during the transfer of Native American religious/spiritual traditions.

Roberts (2003) is similarly focused on theorizing about cultural identity in the adoption of others' spiritual traditions. Like de la Garza, Roberts writes about the white-Caucasian American persons' adoption of Native American spiritual traditions. Roberts' focus, however, is on the rhetorical strategies that white-Caucasian Americans use to justify the appropriation of Native American religious/spiritual traditions. Roberts (2003) argues that white-Caucasian Americans' co-option and commodification of Native

American cultural identity to suit their own needs and wants is a manifestation of the moral philosophy of *emotivism*.

Based on the work of utilitarian philosopher G. E. Moore in *Principia Ethica*, emotivism is the moral philosophy that judgments of goodness are independent of proof. What is determined as "morally good" is merely an intuition found in emotions and hedonistic enjoyments. There is no objectivity in moral decisions; they are merely personal preferences. There is therefore no meaning in action; there is only individualistic self-expression. Roberts (2003) uses the moral philosophy of emotivism to frame white-Caucasian Americans' appropriation of Native American religious/spiritual traditions as being focused primarily on self-image and self-expression.

Both of the above studies in current intercultural communication research that address the transfer of religious/spiritual traditions between cultures are focused on the white-Caucasian American adoption of Native American religious/spiritual traditions. This dissertation project adds a new facet to the literature on intercultural exchange in the domain of religion/spirituality by investigating US-American spiritual followers' adoption of Asian Buddhist religious/spiritual traditions.

US-American Buddhism

According to the *2008 U.S. Religious Landscape Survey* conducted by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 0.7% of US-American adults surveyed reported affiliation with a Buddhist religious/spiritual tradition (i.e., Zen Buddhism, Theravada Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism, Other). Although the number of US-Americans who self-identified as Buddhists is not large, they are unique in that nearly 75% of US-American Buddhists are persons of non-Asian ethnic descent who had "converted" to Buddhism

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later in life. This is in sharp contrast to other east-Asian religious/spiritual traditions such as Islam and Hinduism where most of the followers are native-born adherents.

In addition, almost one in four US-American Buddhists have post-graduate education, compared to the overall national average of one-in-ten in the adult population. What is the nature of intercultural interest that prompts members of the nation's most well-educated populace to convert to Buddhism? What are the communication dynamics of intercultural exchange that take place in the diffusion of Buddhist religious/spiritual traditions from Asian countries into US-America?

Terminology

Buddhism began in India with an Indian prince, Siddhartha Gautama. Buddha means "the awakened one." Prince Gautama was thought to have been awakened from the delusions of human life that shrouded the true nature of reality. Many people wanted to be his student as a result. What the prince taught was later called Buddhism. The religion of Buddhism has been referred to as a philosophy, a way of life, a psychology and a spiritual tradition.

By academic convention, an intellectual distinction is made between religion and spirituality. *Religion* is the term reserved for institutions of organized belief, tradition and ritual (see Miller & Thoresen, 2003 for an in-depth discussion). Religion denotes membership and entails differentiation between denominations. The term *spirituality*, on the other hand refers to a personal experience or feeling of transcendence from mundane, everyday concerns (see e.g., Cawley, 1997; Schmidt & Little, 2007). Spirituality has also been referred to as the feeling of belonging to something greater and more permanent

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than oneself (Kaye, 2006). In addition, spirituality has been defined as the ineffable that underlies all religious traditions (Fox, 2000a, 2000b).

There are some scholars of Hinduism and Buddhism who contest the reference of Indian spiritual traditions as *religions* (see e.g., King, 1999; Lorenzen, 1999). Their primary argument is that Asian spiritual traditions function differently from Christianity. However, the British colonizers did not spend time understanding the cultural differences between these faiths. For example, Lorenzen (1999) traces how Hinduism was created by the British colonizers when they needed to conduct a census of the country. Disparate belief systems were lumped together and given the label "Hinduism" for the purpose of efficient colonial administration. These scholars thus argue that Hinduism and Buddhism should be more accurately thought of as "modern constructions" created by the British colonizers for efficient administration as well as by scholars who want to make academic comparisons and generalizations between cultures. In this project, I therefore use the term *religious/spiritual tradition* to refer to Buddhism, thus reflecting the complications in terminology resulting from India's colonial history with the British.

Cultural Appropriation

The central concept of interest in studies on the white-Caucasian American adoption of Native American spiritual traditions is *cultural appropriation* (see e.g., Aldred, 2000; Churchill, 1994; Tsosie, 2002). Cultural appropriation refers to "the taking—from a culture that is not one's own—of intellectual property, cultural expressions or artifacts, history and ways of knowledge" (Ziff & Rao, 1997).

The concept of cultural appropriation highlights power relations between cultural groups. The same act of "taking" elements from another culture is theorized differently

depending on whether the culture that is doing the taking is in the dominant or subordinate position (R. A. Rogers, 2006).

Cultural exchange is the type of cultural taking that occurs between two cultures that are of relatively similar power status in a society. Cultural exchange is the most equitable form of cultural taking in which there is a "reciprocal exchange of symbols, artifacts, rituals, genres, and/or technologies" (p. 477). In contrast, when a dominant culture appropriates elements of a subordinated culture without substantive reciprocity, permission, and/or compensation, cultural taking becomes a type of *cultural exploitation*. On the reverse, when a dominant culture imposes itself on a subordinated culture, a different type of appropriation, known as *cultural dominance*, is enacted.

Cultural exploitation is a particularly significant issue in the white-Caucasian appropriation of Native American religious/spiritual traditions because of two reasons. First, the white-Caucasian exploitation of Native American religious/spiritual traditions has corrosive effects on the integrity of Native American culture. Inappropriate conduct of Native American culture and erroneous explanations result in the distortion of Native American culture for non-Native Americans trying to learn about Native American culture as well as for future generations of Native Americans trying to learn about their own culture (Churchill, 1994; Whitt, 1995).

Second, the white-Caucasian exploitation of Native American religious/spiritual traditions is critiqued for the pressure it places on Native American tribes to participate in the commodification of their own heritage for economic survival. Ziff and Rao (1997) give the example of how the widespread use of the Kokopelli imagery for tourism and

branding is putting pressure on Native American tribes to do something before they lose all control and authority over the use and adaptation of their cultural signs.

Finally, Richard Rogers (2006) proposes a fourth type of appropriation known as *transculturation*. Rogers proposes that transculturation be used as a new paradigm for thinking about cultural appropriation as it focuses on how cultures are hybrid. If all cultures are hybrid to begin with, there is no need to discuss if an actual, bounded culture is authentic or taken. In other words, there is no need to discuss cultural appropriation if all cultures are always already in transculturation.

Towards the end of his paper, Rogers admits that the cultural politics that shifting the discussion from cultural appropriation to transculturation would produce is "unclear" (p. 498) and might justify colonialism and other oppressions taking place in intercultural communication. Rogers ends his paper with the recommendation that the political commitments of current categories of cultural appropriation should be retained "until the political affiliations of transculturation are further clarified" (p. 499). This episode shows that the study of cultural appropriation is also a statement of the political commitments of the researcher/scholar and his/her standpoint.

Social Location and Standpoint

I am Singaporean-Chinese. The Chinese is the majority ethnic cultural group in Singapore. I am therefore part of the privileged cultural majority in my country. When I came to the United States for graduate school however, I suddenly became a member of the cultural minority here. Of the many things that I had to adjust to as a new entrant into the U.S. society, a major factor was the fear of interacting with strangers (Levine, 1992). Some of this fear came from my personality -- the tendency to be awkward, reserved and

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timid when meeting someone new. Much of my fear however arose from simply being in an intercultural situation.

Gudykunst's (1985, 1988) Anxiety/Uncertainty Management Theory considers fear to be the primary emotion in intercultural interactions. Ting-Toomey's (1993, 2005) Identity Negotiation Theory and Young Yun Kim's (1977) Communication Acculturation Theory also consider intercultural communication to be a space of vulnerability and stress. Fear in intercultural communication has two aspects -- emotional (anxiety) and cognitive (uncertainty). Anxiety is the emotional response to intercultural interaction -- the feelings of unease, tension, worry or apprehension when we communicate with strangers from a foreign culture. The cognitive counterpart of anxiety includes the degree to which we can predict a stranger's behaviors, attitudes, beliefs, feelings and values in a communication interaction (*predictive uncertainty*) and the degree to which we can accurately explain why a stranger might behave, feel, believe and value something in a communication interaction (*explanatory uncertainty*). Individuals' ability to manage their uncertainty and anxiety in intercultural situations determine how effective they would be during intercultural communication.

Anxiety/Uncertainty Management Theory proposes that individuals have an optimal threshold of anxiety and uncertainty during communication interaction. If we experience anxiety and uncertainty that is beyond our maximum threshold, we would be communicatively paralyzed when interacting with strangers. If we experience a level of anxiety or uncertainty that is below our minimum threshold, we would become over-confident and make mistake. Or, we might feel too bored with the interaction to be motivated to carry on the conversation. In short, a little fear is good, too much fear is not.

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My experience of anxiety and uncertainty spiked to uncomfortable levels during intercultural communication encounters. To reduce the discomfort of intercultural interactions, I cocooned myself in communities of US-American Buddhists in the first few years of my stay in the United States. Being in a Buddhist setting filled with religious artifacts from different countries in Asia feels comforting when I am in a foreign country. Peaceful, smiling faces patiently listening to me and talking to me feel welcoming when I do not have many friends. US-American Buddhists were thus a large part of my intercultural experience and my socialization into the United States. When I was not working on my studies, I was at Buddhist events soaking in the familiarity of the Asian-inspired décor used in their shrine rooms, meditation halls and temples, surrounded by US-American people who were gentle in their speech whenever they talked with me.

The groups of US-American Buddhists that I spent most of my leisure hours with were primarily composed of white-Caucasian Americans. I was often the only Chinese person in many of the US-American Buddhist groups that I participated in. Some of my Buddhist friends would ask me how people did a certain Buddhist ritual back in Asia. Others would bow and fold their hands into a prayer posture as way of greeting. Friends from graduate school would ask me to read some Chinese text or ask me where I was from and if I had family in the United States. Repeated interactions of this nature made me extremely conscious that I was different from the people around me.

Prior to coming to the United States, I never had to constantly define myself by my ethnicity. The experience of being a cultural minority in the United States made me identify with my nationality and ethnicity more strongly than before. Paradoxically, my

response to the new-found heightened sense of national and ethnic identity was to intentionally try to make my national and ethnic identity invisible to those around me.

Becoming culturally invisible is one of the communication approaches that cultural minorities (co-cultural groups) use when interacting with individuals from a dominant cultural group (Orbe, 1998). Known as *assimilation*, some members of co-cultural groups attempt to eliminate their distinctive cultural characteristics in order to fit in with the dominant cultural group in society.

Like many Singaporeans who live overseas, I hide the type of English that we speak in Singapore when I am in the United States by using American-English expressions instead of Singlish[4]. When I am in the United States, I am constantly careful to remove any Singlish inflections if I am not speaking with fellow Singaporeans. After five years of living in the United States, I have learned how to make my national and ethnic identity invisible when interacting with US-American people. These days, when I hear myself teaching in the United States or when I am speaking on the phone with my US-American colleagues, I no longer hear my Singaporean-Chinese self.

Why did I choose to assimilate rather than accommodate or separate (Orbe, 1998) in my communication with those from a different cultural background than I? Perhaps it was the constant government campaigns in Singapore to "Speak Good English" (read: speak like a Brit or US-American) that made me feel insecure about accepting my Singlish mother tongue whole-heartedly in intercultural interactions. Perhaps it was the recurring statement that the Singaporean culture was about the three Ks -- *kiasu* (afraid to

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[4] Singlish is the pidginized version of English that is most commonly spoken in Singapore. It is a version of English adopted from the British who colonized Singapore, mixed with influences from Malay, standard Mandarin and Hokkien (Chinese dialect) languages.

lose), *kiasee* (afraid to die) and *kiam-siap* (miserly); a self-deprecating heuristic to suggest that Singaporean culture is ugly and unlovable -- that led me to feel bad about my national identity. Whatever the source, the sense of self-loathing (Lee, 2012) and the belief that my Singaporean cultural traits are not desirable crept into my intercultural interactions with people in the United States. During intercultural encounters, these beliefs about cultural undesirability surfaced as an internal hegemonic voice, telling me to hide my cultural self because I have learned to see it as culturally ugly.

Further, somewhere along the journey of my life, I learned to self-subordinate myself as a cultural being when interacting with white-Caucasian Others. Although I have never lived as a cultural minority in my country, it was somehow naturalized in my mind that there is a hierarchy amongst national/ethnic groups and Singaporean culture is lower on that hierarchy compared to white-Caucasian culture. In response, I censor my cultural self and silence myself during intercultural interactions in the US.

In multiple studies on social distance, Hagendoorn and his colleagues in Europe found a coherent and consistent ethnic hierarchy in the minds of survey participants (see e.g., Hagendoom & Hraba, 1987; Hagendoorn & Hraba, 1989). Based on Blumer's (1958) formulation of prejudice as a sense of social position, their research on social distance in the Netherlands has found "consensual ethnic hierarchy of social distance" in surveys with Dutch secondary and university students.

Regardless of whether survey participants felt positive or negative affect for the cultural groups they were asked about, and regardless of survey participants' levels of racism and/or ethnocentrism, they consistently ranked cultural groups in the same

sequence when asked which group they "preferred."[5] However, these quantitative

studies could not go further to describe how ethnic hierarchies operated in actual

intercultural interaction and/or how they were embodied during communication.

To come across as un-classy was not my preferred public self-image, i.e. *face*

(Brown & Levinson, 1987; E. Goffman, 1955). I wanted to feel good about myself when

I interacted with the US-American people. I wanted to look good to others and to myself.

In Face Negotiation Theory, (Ting-Toomey, 1988; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998), Ting-

Toomey argues that face negotiation is the key to successful intercultural conflict

encounters. Face, in communication research, refers to an individual's "claimed sense of

positive image in the context of social interaction" (Ting-Toomey, 1988).

Face negotiation is also considered an important part of intercultural interaction in

Identity Management Theory. Cupach and Imahori (1993) argue that intercultural

competence is the ability of an individual to successfully negotiate a face that is mutually

acceptable to all the parties in the interaction. The authors propose that when individuals

do not know very much about the cultural groups they are interacting with, they manage

face in intercultural encounters using stereotypes.

Yearning for positive self-face (Brown & Levinson, 1987), I changed myself

when interacting with US-American people. Concerned about coming across as

undesirable if I were to present myself in the fullness of my Singaporean cultural being, I

became constantly vigilant during communication interaction. Intercultural

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[5] Participants in social distance surveys are surveyed on their attitudes towards various nationalities. For
each nationality, survey participants are asked to opt for one of the five options, ranging from a statement
that indicated highest preference for individuals from that nationality to one that indicated lowest
preference: (1) If I wanted to marry, I would marry one of them, (2) I would be willing to have one as a
guest for a meal, (3) (3) I prefer to have one merely as an acquaintance to whom one talks on meeting in the
street; (4) I prefer to have nothing at all to do with them; and (5) I wish someone would kill all of them
(Pettigrew, 1960)

communication became an exercise of constantly adjusting, correcting, adapting and hoping that I would eventually adopt the verbal and nonverbal communication behaviors of my US-American conversation partners.

One of the key characteristics of communication interactions in my first few years of living in the United States was therefore a constant effortful performance of culturally unfamiliar communication behaviors. Concurrent with the performance of foreign communicative behaviors, I was constantly trying to hide the communication behaviors that I was culturally familiar with. Intercultural communication thus required two simultaneous performances -- (1) a performance of the communication behaviors used by those around me and (2) a performance of the absence of communication behaviors that I had learned and socialized from young. The multiple fears that I had as a cultural minority member were thus performatively hidden under a smile that said: "I am just like you." Intercultural communication becomes a site of muted tension thus. My presence and voice as a Singaporean cultural being is muted by a tense performance of expressions and ideologies that the dominant cultural groups in the United States can understand.

The term "muted" in muted group theory (Ardener, 1975, 1978) means whether one is able to say what one wishes to say "where and when they wish to say it." (Ardener, 1975, p. 21). When one is muted, one is relegated to a state of reduced perceptibility. To be muted means that when one is trying to express oneself, the only way to do so is to express oneself through the dominant ideology.

There are two ways that one is muted -- *alienation* (the internalization of the realities of the dominant cultural group) and *silence* (the inability to speak from one's social position) (Wall & Gannon-Leary, 1999). In communication, alienation would be

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akin to performing communication behaviors that are not from one's cultural upbringing. Silence would be akin to the repression of communication behaviors that are from one's culture. The embodied mutedness that I felt when in interaction with others was both the alienation and silencing of the fullness of my Singaporean cultural self in response to the internal hegemonic voice telling me that my cultural self was undesirable to cultural Others. My silence in intercultural interactions is thus complex and multi-layered.

Cultural and Academic Zeitgeist in the United States

When I came to the United States for graduate school, Buddhism was flourishing in popular culture. Publishing houses such as Shambhala, Snow Lion and Wisdom Publications churned out many mass audience paperbacks every year. On the magazine rack at major bookstores such as *Barnes and Nobles*, Buddhist magazines (e.g., *Tricycle*, *Buddhadharma*, *Shambhala Sun*) occupied a significant section of the shelf dedicated to religion/spirituality. In addition, music albums with Buddhist-inspired themes (e.g., *Buddha Bar, Buddha Lounge*) were selling online and in the stores.

In August 2010, Elizabeth Gilbert's book *Eat Pray Love* was released as a movie in the United States. Julia Roberts's portrayal of a spiritual-seeking traveler created a hyper-real (Baudrillard, 1983) imagery for the US-American engagement with Indian religious/ spiritual traditions. The movie visually manifested to the world what the US-American intercultural interest in Asian religious/spiritual traditions looked like, felt like, and sounded like.

An online search found several articles describing how book sales for *Eat Pray Love* soared after an endorsement on *Oprah*. The book so resonated with the US-American public and its international readers that *Time Magazine* named Elizabeth

Gilbert on its list of 100 most influential people in 2008 (Hodgman, 2009). To me, these events signaled a flourishing interest in Asian cultures, particularly in the domain of religion/spirituality, within the US-American cultural zeitgeist.

The academic zeitgeist at this time was also opening up to the inclusion of Asian religious/spiritual traditions in its scholarship. Neuroscientists were meeting with Buddhist monks like the Dalai Lama to discuss how Buddhist belief in the benefits of meditation might be validated in science. Physicists were making comparisons between quantum physics and Buddhist philosophical beliefs. Within intercultural communication scholarship, scholars such as de la Garza (previously published as González, 1994, 2000, 2003) and Miike (2001, 2008) were emphasizing the importance of spirituality/religion in the cultural ontology of Native-American and Asian cultures respectively for intercultural communication scholarship.

Coincidentally, as all of this was happening, it was also a time when I had a strong interest in the religious/spiritual domain of culture. I did not own many material possessions as a graduate student but I had a bookshelf dedicated to religion/spirituality. On one of the shelves, the Indian philosopher, Jiddu Krishnamurti, sat between the Jewish rabbi Abraham Heschel and the Buddhist Dalai Lama. Below that were the biography of Ghandi, a book of letters from Mother Theresa, stories from Zen Buddhism, teachings from Judaism and Theosophy, the poems of Rumi and the esoteric texts of the Freemasons as well as paperback explanations of the Native American traditions.

I was not always interested in religion. My parents did not really care for religion when I was growing up in Singapore. For example, many Singaporean-Chinese families went to Buddhist temples on the first day of the Chinese Lunar New Year. My family

watched this ritual on television. While my relatives were burning incense and making elaborate offerings of food, hell money and paper mansions at their ancestors' altars, we visited my step-grandfather's tomb with a bunch of flowers and simply bowed three times as a mark of respect. My simple child-mind hence equated Buddhism with "being Chinese."

I remember once asking my mother why we did not perform the "normal Chinese rituals" like everybody else. She told me that our family was Christian; those were Buddhist customs. It was true that my step-grandmother had converted to the Christian faith before she passed away. And it was true that my mother enrolled my brother and me in a Christian kindergarten. My memory of Christian kindergarten revolves around building paper boats for a character called "baby Moses" and singing songs such as "Jesus loves me yes I know." That was what Christianity meant to me-- songs and fun times. My parents and I did not read the bible. We did not attend church nor did we belong to a church. In my now 34-year-old mind, I do not see how my family could have qualified as Christian. When I talk to my Buddhist friends these days, I sometimes joke that my family said we were Christian so that we could be excused from being Buddhists. In short, religion was simply not an aspect of culture to which I could relate to back then. In my child-mind, religion was something that other people did.

Ironically, my journey towards a doctorate of philosophy in communication began from an interest in Buddhist philosophy. In fact, I do not think that I would have come to graduate school if my journey into the religious aspect of culture had not taken place the way that it did. Religion was shoved into my face in the middle of a heated argument. This was in my third year of college, in my ex-partner's dorm room. When he could not

outwit me, my ex-partner would retort, "What you said is so Buddhist!" Given my unfamiliarity with all things religious, I found this label extremely offensive.

At the same time, the comment stuck like a riddle. What do you mean I am "so Buddhist?" When my emotions calmed down, my curiosity led me to read my first book on Buddhism. It was a biography of an English lady (Diane Perry) who later became a Buddhist nun (Tenzin Palmo). There was very little in that book on Buddhist philosophy. It was primarily a story about how Tenzin Palmo meditated in a cave for twelve years, in the Himalayan Mountains. However, that was enough to spark my interest in Buddhism.

Two years after I graduated from college, I had some time outside of work for hobbies. I took the occasional weekend off from work to learn meditation or to attend seminars and evening talks on Buddhism. The more I learned about Buddhism, the more curious I was about its philosophy. I wanted to know how the various concepts in Buddhism were different from each other, the differences between the various schools of thought, and how Buddhist theories explained the different experiences in life — what is thought; what is emotion; what is life; what is death; what is consciousness, etc.

I also wanted to know how the various Buddhist religious/spiritual philosophies were similar to and different from the philosophies in other religions such as Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism etc. One thing led to another. My progression from ignorance and ambivalence towards all things religious to being completely enamored with religion/spirituality happened in a short span of time. I bugged a colleague's father to teach me meditation. I signed up for classes to learn about the basic concepts and

frameworks in Buddhist philosophy. I committed to learning *Pali* chanting[6] every

Saturday morning and Sunday afternoon. I began to regularly attend a Buddhist group

after work every Monday for meditation practice. By the time I was ready to leave

Singapore for graduate school in America I was fully engaged and immersed in all kinds

of "Asian Buddhisms" —Sri Lankan Theravada Buddhism, various Tibetan Mahayana

Buddhisms, Taiwanese Mahayana Buddhism and local Singaporean Buddhisms.

I contacted Buddhist groups in Arizona once I confirmed my flight to the United

States. I began participating in the activities of a Buddhist group in Phoenix within the

first to second weekend after I arrived. By my second-year in the doctorate program, I

had a regular Buddhism schedule. Every Tuesday and Thursday evening I would go to a

Buddhist group within walking distance from where I lived for two hours of interaction

with a local Buddhist study group. On Sundays, I would go to another Buddhist group in

Phoenix for meditation and chanting. Once a month, the Tuesday/Thursday Buddhist

group would hold a four-hour seminar on a book that someone in the group had been

assigned to read. S/he would summarize the book for discussion and we would also have

another speaker or two. In addition, about once every three months the Phoenix Buddhist

group would hold a weekend-long Buddhist class from Friday till Sunday to teach

meditation and Buddhist concepts. I would attend these as well, time permitting.

Despite my heavy involvement in Buddhism, however, I did not actually consider

myself as "doing religion" when participating in the various Buddhist classes and events

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[6] Buddhist texts in the Sri Lankan Theravada Buddhist traditions are written in the Pali language. The Pali language is significant to the Sri Lankan Theravada Buddhist traditions because it considered thought that the Buddha taught in Pali to the ordinary people (and the Buddha taught in Sanskrit to the royalty). The Sri Lankan Theravada Buddhist traditions pride themselves for "preserving the Buddha's original words." Therefore, they do not translate their texts when chanting. They want to chant in the Pali language.

in Arizona. I thought of my activities in Buddhist groups as being very similar to my activities in the doctoral program. Graduate seminars required me to complete various readings before class. There would be assignments to write and discussions with classmates. Buddhist groups also required me to read either a book chapter or an article before class. We met every week to discuss the concepts and theories in the readings assigned. There would be activities during class and sometimes, homework as well.

The key difference between Buddhist study group and graduate seminar was that my classmates in the Buddhist study groups did meditation and chanting. In addition, they talked about deities and gods in class. The experience of studying Communication in a graduate seminar was therefore significantly different from but yet very similar to my experience of studying Buddhism with the local religious/spiritual groups. Graduate school and Buddhism were both cornerstone experiences to my time in the United States.

Having spent most of my time investigating Buddhist religion/spirituality since coming to the United States, I had more experience with Buddhism than with other religious/spiritual traditions. When it came time to write a dissertation project, I decided to merge my personal interest in religion/spirituality with my academic interest in intercultural communication to investigate the communication dynamics in the adoption of Buddhist religious/spiritual traditions by spiritual followers in the United States.

Assumptions, Sensitizing Concepts and Guiding Questions

I made several assumptions at the beginning of this dissertation project. First, I defined US-Americans' adoption of the Buddhist religious/spiritual traditions as a form of intercultural experience. This definition was based on the assumption that Buddhism was culturally foreign to most US-Americans. In addition, I assumed that American

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spiritual followers' adoption of Buddhist religious/spiritual traditions was a type of intercultural exchange -- that encountering with the foreign was part of the US-American experience of Buddhism. This assumption was heavily influenced by the hyper-real (Baudrillard, 1983) image of Julia Roberts interacting with Indian people and meditating in an Indian Ashram in the movie *Eat Pray Love*. Looking back at the beginnings of this project, I find it ironic that after spending so much time over a period of three years with US-American Buddhists, my image of a "real US-American Buddhist" was based on a character in a movie.

Second, I adopted cultural identity as a key sensitizing concept for data collection. The studies by de la Garza (writing as González, 1997) and Roberts (2003) theorize about the nature of cultural identity in the white-Caucasian adoption of Native American religious/spiritual traditions. In both studies, the authors critique the co-option of Native American cultural identities by white-Caucasian Americans as unethical cultural appropriation. In turn, I wonder what sort of deep change would occur in the cultural identities of US-American spiritual followers who are engaged in the adoption of Buddhist religious/spiritual traditions from Asia.

Within current intercultural communication literature, three theories explain the relationship between communication, identity, and culture -- cultural identity theory (Collier, 1998; Collier & Thomas, 1988), identity management theory (Cupach & Imahori, 1993; Imahori & Cupach, 2005) and identity negotiation theory (Ting-Toomey, 2005). In cultural identity theory, Collier (1998; Collier & Thomas, 1988) articulates the process of intercultural communication as the discursive ascription and avowal of multiple cultural identities. Ascription refers to others' attribution of one's identity, i.e.,

"this is how I see you seeing me as a member of my cultural group here and now" (Collier, 1998, p. 133). Avowal on the other hand refers to the front stage enactment of one's own identity in a communication interaction.

To become a "real member" or insider of a particular cultural group requires more than an avowal of that identity; it includes the demonstrated ability to understand and use the symbolic forms of the cultural group and to enact normative practices of the group (Collier, 1998, p. 131). That being said, cultural identity theory also argues that it is difficult for both in-group members as well as out-group members to pinpoint who is an insider and who is an outsider because the processes of avowal and ascription are independent of each other. Therefore, according to cultural identity theory, intercultural communication competence is where "one's ascriptions of cultural identity appropriately and effectively match those that are avowed" (Collier & Thomas, 1988, p. 101).

Like cultural identity theory, identity management theory and identity negotiation theory consider improving individuals' intercultural communication competence as the most important end-goal of intercultural communication research. In identity negotiation theory, Ting-Toomey (2005) similarly posits that cultural identity is primarily created through communication. Like cultural identity theory, identity negotiation theory argues that identity negotiation is a mutual communication activity -- "at the same time the communicators attempt to evoke their own desired identities in the interaction, they also attempt to challenge and support others' identities" (Ting-Toomey, 2005, p. 217). Hence, intercultural communication is predicated as a transactional interaction where both parties negotiate their own and others' self-images.

Unlike cultural identity theory, identity negotiation theory is more focused on identifying the various domains that have important influence on the development of individuals' identity (e.g., family socialization, gender socialization) and determining ways to help individuals obtain accurate knowledge of these identity domains for themselves and others during intercultural encounters.

From the perspective of identity negotiation theory, the key to effective intercultural communication is learning to be mindful to our own and others' salient identity issues. Identity negotiation theory assumes that everyone in all cultures desire both positive group-based and positive individual-based cultural identities. Therefore, identity negotiation theory focuses on how individuals can enhance identity understanding, respect and affirmative valuation of their conversation partners.

Identity management theory was developed with heavy influence from the two previous theories. Identity management theory (IMT) adds to cultural identity theory (CIT) and identity negotiation theory (INT) by bringing in the concept of face and facework to its conceptualization of intercultural communication competence. Imahori and Cupach (2005) define intercultural communication competence as competent face negotiation that is mutually satisfying. The authors propose that face negotiation in intercultural communication proceeds differently at different points in the communication relationship.

Individuals experience face-threat when their cultural identities are constrained through stereotyping (i.e., identity-freezing), particularly in the early phases of their relationship with each other. After prolonged interaction with the Other, Cupach and Imahori (1993) predict that new *enmeshed relational identities* will emerge. Enmeshed

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relational identities are a result of the de-emphasis of one's cultural identity in favor of developing a mutually acceptable and convergent relational identity.

The authors however were vague on the nature of enmeshed relational identities that would develop as a result of intercultural interaction. They state that it is not realistic to define the nature of enmeshed relational identities as intercultural communicators continuously grapple with growing and changing cultural identities. Prolonged intercultural relationships meant the continual negotiation and renegotiation of more and more aspects of one's cultural identity.

All three theories theorize cultural identity as constituted by communication. There is no "essence" of cultural identity outside of communication. Similarly, critical intercultural communication scholars argue that communication is not just a passive vehicle for the expression of one's cultural identity (Mendoza, Halualani, & Drzewiecka, 2002). Cultural identity is constituted by an ensemble of discourses, customs and practices that have been entrenched and assumed to be "obvious" and "natural" as a result of repeated performative citations. With the above literatures on cultural identity in mind, I created the following guiding question to give direction to my dissertation -- What is the cultural identity of those who adopt others' cultural traditions and meaning systems?

Third, I assumed that place would be another important concept to my dissertation project. In *Eat Pray Love,* Elizabeth Gilbert makes a spiritual pilgrimage to Italy, India and Bali (Indonesia). Visual depictions of Gilberts' visits to holy men in temples and scenes of her living with gurus in ashrams suggest that spirituality is intricately tied to being in place. It seemed possible that US-Americans interested in Buddhism would be interested in India, Japan, or some other Asian country with strong Buddhist tradition.

Literature in leisure science and natural resource management is well-versed on the relationship between space, place and identity (see e.g., Proshansky, Fabian, & Kminoff, 1983; Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1977). According to place-identity research, individuals develop a particular identity from acting and living in particular types of environments (Proshansky, 1978). People often self-identify with the towns or states where they were born and raised in. *Place identity* is thus an aspect of self-identity.

Place identity is made up of the "cognitions about the physical world in which the individual lives" (p. 59). These cognitions could be memories, ideas, feelings, preferences, or values about particular places that one felt attached to. In particular, Proshansky's (1978) conceptualization of place identity focuses on the importance of the "environmental past"—environments that have contributed to the individuals' satisfaction of biological, psychological, social and cultural needs in the past, and thus continue to live on in their memories.

One of the key ways that space become place is through *narratives*. Spaces become places when communities embed cultural teachings in the physical environment (Basso, 1988, 1996). For example, Basso (1998) describes how the Southwester Apache people he studied had a name and story for the rivers and trees in their vicinity to serve as reminders of the values that their tradition wanted to emphasize, such as humility and mindfulness. Kathleen Stewart (1996) describes how the elderly inhabitants of a small rural town find their lives meaningful because they have a story for each of the houses in the community. Their oral histories of place made them feel attached to the town even after the young people had left and the town became gradually more desolate and run down. Narratives thus make space into place (Stewart, 2008).

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Narratives of place are significant to the Buddhist spiritual/religious tradition as well. The traditional way of narrating a Buddhist teaching is to begin with the phrase "Thus I have heard" and then to follow that up with a list of the beings present as well as the location of this teaching. In addition, the Buddhist mythology includes stories about imaginary places, such as Shambhala, Shangri-lah and Mount Meru. These places are depicted in sand mandalas and elaborate Tibetan Buddhist *tangkars* (cloth posters). Visualizations of these mythological places are part of the religious practice of some Buddhist denominations.

Given this context, I began the project assuming that place would have something to do with the US-American adoption of Buddhism. Might US-Americans identify with Indian places? Perhaps US-American Buddhists tell each other narratives about Buddhist places? With visual the image of Julia Roberts singing in an Indian ashram in my mind, I thus created the second guiding question for the dissertation project -- What is the role of place in the adoption of others' cultural traditions and meaning systems?

Finally, I assumed that material culture would be an important aspect of my dissertation project. When Elizabeth Gilbert returned to America from her travels, in addition to publishing a book and providing the materials for a movie, she also opened a retail store in New Jersey selling religious artifacts from Southeast Asia. There is in fact a picture on the *New York Times* of Gilbert posing in a store chock-full of Buddha statues, wooden cabinets and a stone figurine of *Ganesha*.

Scholars of theology have observed that material culture is a large part of the contemporary self-spirituality movement (see e.g., Carrette & King, 2005; Heelas, 1996). In particular, the cross-cultural adoption of Buddhism has been critiqued as a *spiritual*

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commodification or *commercialization* (Jones, 2007; York, 2001). Padgett (2000) used the artifact of the meditation pillow to discuss how Buddhism is heavily marketed in America. Jameson's (2008) thesis discussed the US-American adoption of Asian religious items.

Given the zeitgeist of the US-American adoption of Buddhism, I thus assumed that material culture would be important to US-American spiritual followers who have converted to Buddhism. However, there was no clear indication on how material culture would feature into a theory of intercultural communication. Therefore the third guiding question that I created for my dissertation project is -- What is the role of material culture in the adoption of others' cultural traditions and meaning systems?

Summary

Religion/spirituality is the least studied cultural domain within intercultural communication literature. A confluence of factors (interest in religion/spirituality, fear of intercultural communication, supportive cultural and academic zeitgeist) led me to this study on the US-American adoption of Buddhist religious/spiritual traditions for my dissertation project.

There are currently only two studies discussing the adoption of others' religious/ spiritual cultural traditions and meaning systems. Both of these studies focus on white-Caucasian American persons' adoption of Native American religion/spirituality. Both studies focus on issues of cultural appropriation and cultural identity. This project adds to this small body of literature on intercultural communication in the domain of religion by investigating the embodied communication dynamics of intercultural exchange in the US-American adoption of Asian Buddhist religious/spiritual traditions.

Chapter 2

METHOD

My predilection for Buddhism induced me to take on US-Americans' adoption of

Buddhist religious/spiritual traditions as the focus of my dissertation. However, the

religion/spirituality domain of culture has yet to be richly explored in intercultural

communication research. Other than identity and cultural appropriation, it was unclear

which theories or concepts might be relevant to the adoption of Others' cultural traditions

and meaning systems. I thus proceeded with inductive theorizing.

Qualitative research is inductive (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 7). By *inductive*,

qualitative researchers mean that they discover concepts and theories that are relevant to

their phenomenon of study from the data rather than investigate a phenomenon through

the assumed lenses of existing theories. Glaser and Strauss (1967) articulate a process of

systematic inductive theory discovery that is grounded in data. My data analysis is

informed by their grounded theory methodology of qualitative research.

Although qualitative research is inductive, "pure induction is impossible" (Taylor

& Bogdan, 1998, p. 8). As the human instrument (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), qualitative

researchers cannot escape their assumptions of the world nor the theoretical frameworks

they have learned. My schooling in intercultural communication alerts me to the issues of

cultural identity in the appropriation of Others' cultural traditions. Explicit knowledge of

theories on place in leisure science and natural resource management literature sensitize

me to question the role of place in US-Americans' adoption of Buddhism. Three years of

personal interaction with US-American Buddhists provided tacit knowledge of the

richness of material expression in US-American Buddhism. This, plus media images of

Julia Roberts in an Indian ashram and Elizabeth Gilbert surrounded by her Asian religious wares, led me to pursue questions about the role of material culture in US-Americans' adoption of Buddhism.

In short, identity, place and material culture were *sensitizing concepts* (Bulmer, 1979) from which I developed questions to guide what I would observe and record as I moved through data collection. Sensitizing concepts are those that "give the user a general sense of reference and guidance in approaching empirical instances" (p. 654). Sensitizing concepts are different from the *definitive concepts* (Bulmer, 1979) used in quantitative research. The former suggests general directions along which to look and the later provides prescriptions of what to see. In other words, identity, place and material culture were only to be used as *points of departure* (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 16 - 17) from which I would begin data collection rather than concepts that I decided that I wanted to find in the phenomenon that I was about to do research on.

The qualitative methods used in this dissertation project were largely ethnographic (Spradley, 1979, 1980). I began with participant observation amongst groups of US-Americans who came together for the purpose of learning about Buddhism. This was followed by formal interviews with US-Americans who were learning and teaching Buddhism. Data analysis was informed by Glaser and Strauss's (1967) grounded theory methodology, as articulated by Charmaz (2006) and Strauss and Corbin (1998).

In addition to explicit knowledge on the concepts of place, identity and material culture, the inductive process of theorization is also indebted to the practical application of Sarah Amira de la Garza's (writing as Gonzalez, 2000) Native-centered ontology of the four seasons of ethnography. Through experience with deep reflexive exercises and

personal communication with de la Garza over a period of five years (starting in July 2007) I developed skillful methods of watchfully attending to habitual patterns in the human instrument (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) that would impede accountable (González, 2003) data collection and reporting in qualitative research. Although the ontology of the four seasons of ethnography was not actively applied in the process of data collection, experiential learning in deep reflexive methods (de la Garza, personal communication, 2012) enabled conscious awareness and self-reflexivity during both data collection and data analysis.

In the following sections, I will detail the methods used in this project based on the chronological order in which they are employed. I will begin by describing the method of participant observation used in this project. This will be followed by a discussion on the method of interviewing. Discussion on the method of data analysis will be interspersed within these two sections, reflecting the use of the constant comparison method of data analysis during fieldwork.

Participant Observation

Participant observation involves understanding social phenomena via relatively prolonged engagements in a setting, taking part in the activities of the people in the setting and then describing the scenes observed (Schwandt, 2007). Spradley (1980) states three key elements to address when doing participant observation -- place, activity and actor (p. 39 – 41). The first step to participant observation is place identification. Here, *place* refers to the social situation that one is observing in. The qualitative researcher begins with a single identifiable place where people are present and engaged in activities.

In the process of participant observation, the researcher may choose to stay at a single location or move between several locations belonging to the same identifiable type of place. The richness of data that a location provides determines whether the researcher will stay or move between sites. In short, place identification means two things: (1) identifying the social situation that is most relevant to the research focus and (2) selecting geographic locations where the identified social situation may be observed.

Place

The focus of my dissertation is US-Americans' adoption of Buddhism. Therefore, the place that is most relevant for participant observation is one where US-Americans are engaging in activities where they are learning about Buddhism. Based on my tacit knowledge of Buddhism, I know that people usually learn about Buddhism in one of three ways: (1) visiting a Buddhist temple or Buddhist center and participating in its activities, (2) signing up for a course on Buddhism or (3) attending one-time retreats or weekend seminars where the speaker is teaching about Buddhism. Therefore, the sites that I considered appropriate for participant observation included Buddhist centers where people were practicing and learning about Buddhism, Buddhist classes and/or weekend retreats and seminars that were open to the general public.

In terms of selecting specific locations for participant observation, field sites were selected using convenience sampling (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 116). The criterion used to determine which Buddhist groups, seminars and classes to include were — (1) whether they were available during the period of fieldwork, (2) accessible to the general public, (3) relevant to the overall research interest and (4) offered the possibility of revisiting the

site to conduct multiple observations (Spradley, 1980). The list of the locations where I conducted participant observation is detailed below.

Table 1

Participant Observation Sites

Field Site	Activities participated in / observed
Arizona Zen	Beginner's orientation, regular Sunday meditation, weekend seminar
Arizona Gelugpa	Weekly classes on concepts and frameworks used in Tibetan Buddhist
Arizona Kagyu	Weekend seminar and weekly class on Tibetan Buddhism
Phoenix Kagyu	Two evening seminars on mediation and the basics of Buddhism
Arizona Theravada	Weekly classes on Buddhist concepts and beginner's meditation sessions
Texas Theravada	Weekly Buddhist class for Vietnamese-American children

My first observation location was at *Arizona Zen*, a small temple that was close to my apartment. I had heard about Arizona Zen from friends in the Buddhist communities in Phoenix. This temple was known for providing an in-depth introduction to Buddhism for newcomers to the temple. I did not visit the temple prior to doing my dissertation as my own Buddhist practice was not of the Zen persuasion. However, this location fit the criteria of availability, accessibility, relevance and sustainability of multiple visits. Hence I chose the temple as my first research site. I visited this location three times to see what attendees were doing to learn about Buddhism. I stopped visiting the site when I noticed that most of the time was spent in silent meditation. There was very little activity I could observe that would add to my understanding of US-Americans' adoption of Buddhism.

My second research site was a local Buddhist group that had just begun a series of classes on Buddhism for the general public. I found *Arizona Gelugpa* via google.com

using search terms such as "Buddhism", "eastern spirituality" and *sangha* (community). Classes met every week. There were assigned readings and homework to be completed before each meeting. The different activities and discussions at each class session added to my knowledge of US-Americans' adoption of Buddhism. For example, I made notes about the questions that the US-American students had about Buddhism, the students' perceptions of Buddhism and the changes they made to their lives in the name of Buddhism. I visited this site repeatedly over the span of three months. I stopped visiting this site when it became increasingly clear that access to their classes for research was contingent upon my willingness to eventually convert to their religious tradition.

My third observation site was a weekend seminar of Buddhist teaching and ritual by a Tibetan monk (*Arizona Kagyu*). I learned about this public seminar from a Buddhist group that I regularly participated in for about two years. The seminar was advertised via email through two local Kagyu Buddhist groups. I made three sets of field notes from this event. Participation at this weekend seminar led me to my next observation site.

On the second day of this three-day seminar, I met a white-Caucasian American lady who had been living in Hong Kong, China and Singapore for the past seven years. She recognized my Singaporean accent from across the room and she came over to chat with me. We hit it off immediately, comparing notes on living in Hong Kong, Singapore and Arizona. Sandra (pseudonym) gave me her name-card and we stayed in contact. After a few social visits, I learned that Sandra was in the process of setting up a new Buddhist center in Phoenix (*Phoenix Kagyu*). I volunteered help her publicize her first event to the local Buddhist groups as well as to the ASU community. In return, she introduced me to her teacher and arranged for two sessions where I could interact with

her teacher to learn more about Buddhism. I also attended two evening public seminars held at her new Buddhist center and made field notes from my participation at these events.

My fifth observation site (*Arizona Theravada*) was also found through email. Arizona Theravada was conducting an eight-week course on *The Noble Eightfold Path*, a key framework in Buddhism. I attended two of these classes. In the second class, the teacher Leonard mentioned that he facilitated a regular meditation session for beginning Buddhists at the temple every Wednesday. I began to conduct participant observation at these sessions to expand my knowledge of US-Americans' adoption of Buddhism.

My sixth observation site was a Buddhist meditation center in Texas (*Texas Theravada*). Similar to what Sandra at Phoenix Kagyu was doing, my informant at Texas Theravada, Padma, was turning her home into a Buddhist Center. I got to know Padma through my professor and we arranged for a two-day weekend visit. In addition to converting her house into a Buddhist center, Padma is currently training to become a nun. She accompanies her teacher to give weekly teachings about Buddhism at a local church.

I stayed in Padma's meditation center during the trip. The night I arrived, Padma graciously gave me a tour of her meditation center, answered my questions about the logistics of setting up a meditation center and the decisions she made in decorating her place to "make it Buddhist." The next day, I accompanied Padma and her teacher on their duties at a local Vietnamese temple. I attended the weekly Buddhist class they offered to the Vietnamese-American children as well as sat in on the rituals that they conducted.

Activity

I took the role of participant-as-observer (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 146) at all the participant observation sites described above. This meant that in addition to actively observing the Buddhist event, I would do anything that the "ordinary participants" would do, including meditation, chanting, and prostrations. For those who conduct research in naturalistic settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), the field site can thus be an overwhelming place. Spradley (1980) explains that initially, the researcher is likely to see a stream of activities that seem to have nothing to do with each other. In addition, Spradley (1980) says that "when we first enter a social situation, it is often difficult to know what kinds of actors are present" (p. 41). Repeated observation leads to the discovery of discernible patterns in the activities of the social situation. Repeated observations also enable the researcher to notice differences in features that could be used to identify the types of actors in the scene, such as via their clothing, behavior, seating arrangement, voice, etc.

Repeated observation at Buddhist events is therefore necessary for insight into the US-American adoption of Buddhism. However, observation alone is insufficient. One of the key differences between participant observation as a research method and "ordinary participation" is record keeping (Spradley, 1980, p. 58). The process of recording each participant observation session begins with field jottings and ends with typing up full field notes. Unlike the ordinary participant, the participant observer takes a participating-in-order-to-write approach (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). This means that when I enter into a Buddhist group as part of my dissertation project (as opposed to participating in a Buddhist event out of ordinary, general leisure interest in Buddhism) I enter into a scene with the intention to remember and write details about what I saw.

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My field notes included meditation instructions and explanations of Buddhist concepts. In addition, I recorded conversations overheard before and after the Buddhist event-- the questions people asked about Buddhism, the comments they made about Buddhism and the conversations they had with each other in a Buddhist setting. Given that place was one of my sensitizing concepts, I also made notes about the setting in and around each Buddhist center -- what decorations were put up, how things were placed and where they were placed. I made notes of how and where participants sat, how they sat (i.e., on cushions or floor or chair) and how they placed themselves vis-à-vis the teacher/facilitator in the room. I noted the neighborhood the Center was in, the type of building that they used (residential or office room), how big the place was, the color it was painted in, the materials used on the floors and carpeting, pictures on the walls, sayings on bulletin boards, book that were on sale, membership and donation forms and flyers as well as any other signage and advertising. In short, I captured anything that I thought was relevant to being able to talk about US-Americans' adoption of Asian Buddhist religious/spiritual traditions. I recorded as widely as possible, as much as I could, with the hope that more information would give a better chance at arriving at something interesting to say at the end of the project.

Based on participant observation between mid-November 2011 and August 2012, I made 18 sets of field-notes. There were 173 pages of single-spaced text in 10-point Times New Roman font. I made field-notes on a computer instead of writing them in long-form. Each page in the Word document was divided into two columns. The column on the right took up approximately two-thirds of the page. In this column, I elaborated on my field jottings to describe things, people, behavior and conversations that I observed.

The column on the left was reserved for emotions, associations, and any other commentary that I had of the scenes that I had observed. Sometimes, there was insufficient room on the left-hand column for my comments. I therefore also used the comment function in Word to insert additional comments, particularly those to myself about things I should watch out for during future observation sessions.

Actors

In addition to record-keeping, another difference between ordinary participation and participant observation is that the latter has to maintain a sense of *dual citizenship* (Schwandt, 2007) in the social situations they are participating in. Participant observers are expected to have "primary allegiance to an academic culture or disciplinary home while taking up temporary residence in the culture or group being studied" (p. 220). Therefore, researchers who begin as members of the social groups that they do research in often find themselves needing to change their behavior during fieldwork to as to move from ordinary participation to become a participant observer (Adler & Adler, 1987).

After engaging in Buddhist events for three years, my religious identity became the primary identity that I affiliated with whenever I was in the Buddhist context. This affiliation caused me problems during participant observation. When I began fieldwork, I repeatedly reminded myself that I was attending Buddhist events "for work." I thought that I could consciously activate my academic citizenship by intellectual commitment and active awareness. However, upon reflection, the manner with which I approached the task of getting informed consent indicated that allegiance to academic citizenship required more of me than merely *deciding* that I would now change my modus operandi from ordinary participation to participant observation.

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When I first began participant observation at Arizona Zen, I hesitated to inform those around me of my status as a researcher. In addition, in the first few months of participant observation, my reflexive memos (de la Garza, personal communication, 30 January 2012) were arguments to myself about why I should not be critical of the groups that I was doing participant observation in. My excuse was that I was protecting the reputation of the traditions I was observing.

When I read the memos later, these arguments sounded hollow. The lessons I had internalized about facing accountability and truthiness during ethnography (González, 2003) forced me to pause to reconsider how I was proceeding with data collection. What is the truth here? I was having difficulty suspending my identification with Buddhism when I was in the field. In naked awareness, I saw how my allegiance was primarily to the Buddhist groups I was participating in rather than to the academic community. I realized I was making excuses to avoid doing my job.

I thus decided to increase the presence of my academic status in the Buddhist events I was attending. The way that I did this was to make informed consent an explicit criterion for including a site in my sample. For any new Buddhist groups that I would include in my sample, I would begin the first contact by telling them that I was there for research. If they did not agree to my presence, then I will not conduct participant observation at those sites. But first, I would begin with those Buddhist groups I was already involved in for the purpose of participant observation.

The occasion was either in my third or fourth class with Arizona Gelugpa. The topic of the day was motivation. We were discussing in class the "right motivation" to have when listening to Buddhist teachings so that one gets the best benefit from the

teachings and attains enlightenment more quickly. After class, I took the opportunity to announce my academic citizenship to the Buddhist teacher. I began the conversation by telling the teacher that I was feeling conflicted about my motivation for coming to class. We were just talking in class about the importance of having right motivation when coming to Buddhism but my main motivation right now was to get a PhD. I was doing research in Buddhist groups as part of the process of getting the PhD. Therefore, I do not think I have the "right motivation" for coming to class.

I was very nervous about his response; would he throw me out? Would he get angry that I was doing observation instead of paying attention to his lecture? I told him that my dissertation was about US-Americans learning Buddhism. Then I asked him: "Is it ok for me to still come to your class?" He paused for a while and then he smiled. He tells me that it does not have to be either-or. "You could become both Buddhist and PhD by the end of my project." I understood what he said as meaning that I was allowed to be in his class as long as I was also open to the possibility of becoming a Buddhist in their tradition. Religious conversion is traditionally not part of the Buddhist way of inducting new members. During fieldwork, however, two of the six groups where I did participant observation tried to convert me to "become Buddhist." As I had no desire to convert to any religious tradition during fieldwork, I intentionally kept my relationship with the group in Arizona Gelugpa ambiguous after that conversation with the teacher. I let them think that I might one day convert and join the fold so that I might stay in class and continue doing observations. However, the charade was too emotionally taxing on my conscience and I began to gradually drift away from the classes held by this group.

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By the time I visited my fifth research site (Arizona Theravada), I was more at home with my researcher identity. I had developed a stronger embodied sense of what it meant to have dual citizenship as a participant observer. The class that I was going to observe cost $40 and the registration deadline had passed by the time I saw the email. I turned up to class early on the first day and sought out the person in charge. He was a Sri Lankan monk. I told the monk that I was here to do my dissertation project and that I was not registered for class. I went in with full preparedness that I would leave if I was turned away because the group did not want to participate in academic research.

To my surprise, the monk did not ask me about my project. Instead he asked me where I was from. I told him I was from Singapore. The monk said he had lived in Singapore for about six months and he seemed very excited to meet a fellow Southeast Asian. I think he bonded with me over my nationality rather than my affiliation with Buddhism. The monk welcomed my dissertation interest and made a standing offer to come to speak with him anytime if I had questions about Buddhism. He also said I could attend class for free. I happily accepted his generous offer. The monk also personally introduced me to the teacher after class. With these experiences, I notice a change in the way I obtained informed consent during participant observation-- from occasional casual announcement of my dissertation interest out of a fear of rejection to an open invitation for participation and an explicit announcement of my academic affiliation.

Coding

My first participant observation was conducted on 13th November 2011. By March 2012, I had ten sets of field notes from participant observation at three different

sites: Arizona Zen, Arizona Gelugpa and Arizona Kagyu. The data was beginning to feel unwieldy. I needed a way to make sense of this information. I needed to begin coding.

Coding means naming segments of data with a label that categorizes, summarizes and accounts for each piece of data (Charmaz, 2006, p. 46). The function of codes is to condense the text by providing a "handle" (in the form of a label) so the researcher can refer to the data more succinctly. As recommended by Charmaz (2006), I used in-vivo terms and verbs as open codes so as to "see action in every segment of data" and avoid blindly applying existing concepts or theories to describe the data. Some examples of open codes are "teaching what you learned", "asking about material sustenance" and "helping the newbie."

I chose to code by hand because this method was most familiar to me. I printed out my field notes and numbered each line on the page. I then described the text in each line with a phrase, i.e., I assigned a code to each line. The way that I determined the code I would write was by asking myself the key question in the grounded theory method-- "what is happening here?" (Glaser, 1978). This means that when I moved through each line of text, I would ask myself the same question -- "what does this tell me about the people here" -- over and over again.

Given that I had been immersed in the Buddhist culture since 2006, I chose to code line-by-line so as to slow me down to look at my field notes more carefully. While my familiarity with Buddhism gave me tacit knowledge to interpret group norms and Buddhist texts, my familiarity also made me prone to uncritically accepting what I saw and heard. I did not choose word-by-word coding because it was too fine-toothed for my

research purpose. Word-by-word coding is more suited to projects where the structure and flow of words is important.

Constant comparison

As informed by the grounded theory methodology, coding was a process of constant comparison -- comparing codes in one set of field notes to codes in other sets of field notes; comparing incidents described in one set of field notes to incidents in other sets of field notes. In addition, one compares codes and data to literature. For example, when I wrote "performing Buddhism" as a code I thought about Goffman's (1959) book on the presentation of self in everyday life. I played around with the concepts of *front stage* and *back stage* to see if they might apply as codes for the observations in my field notes. Constant comparison is such a fundamental process to the grounded theory methodology that grounded theory has also been affectionately referred to as the constant comparison method (Strauss & Corbin, 1994).

From participant observation between November 2011 and March 2012, I made 85 pages of field notes. Coding the text line by line gave me hundreds of initial codes. What to do with so many codes? The method I used was to compare the initial codes in one set of field notes with the codes in another set of field notes. In addition, I compared the codes I had within other codes in the same set of field notes to make sense of "what was happening". Using this process of comparing code-with-code, code-with-data, and data-with-data, I revised and condensed the long list of initial codes into forty codes. I then typed these codes into a codebook. The codebook was a consolidated list of codes that included a short definition for each code as well as examples from field notes. Table 2 provides an example of a code in my codebook from 6th March 2012.

Table 2

Codebook Sample 6th March 2012

Concept	Definition	Examples / References
Finding parallel in familiar frameworks	Using "local" examples to teach Buddhism	The two oppositions are like birth and death (AzZen Teisho 100) Karma is like the Aristotelian explanation of efficient causation (AzZen Orientation 79)

The next step was to categorize these forty codes into more abstract groups or *categories* (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). A category is a higher-order concept under which multiple codes could be classified (p. 113). For example, I grouped the codes "making separate space for Buddhism," "disallowing shoes" and "putting away personal belongings" into the category of "avoiding disruption." Grouping codes into categories enables the researcher to condense the number of data units to work with.

The manner in which the categories were created was again by referring to Glaser's (1978) question "what is happening here?" I first wrote each code onto an index card. Codes that spoke to the same phenomenon, concept or activity were grouped together. I gave each group (i.e., category) a label that described the phenomenon, concept or activity that they addressed. Sometimes these labels came from one of the codes or a phrase in my field notes.

Axial Coding

In addition to forming categories, I also asked myself how the categories that emerged were related to each other, a process termed *axial coding* by Strauss and Corbin (1998, p. 123). How did each of these categories relate to each other? Which categories were sub-categories of another category? I drew maps that listed the concepts with line

and arrows between them to articulate the relationship between categories. De la Garza (personal communication, 30 January 2012) describes this process of mapping the categories as one where the researcher is "trying to use the categories to tell a story of what is going on in the setting by using the categories to illustrate themes."

Memo-writing accompanies mapping in the process of axial coding. For each category, the researcher writes a theoretical memo that describes the category. This is followed by a description of the properties and dimensions of the category, as evidenced by examples in the data. In short, the process of axial coding is (1) mapping the categories and (2) writing theoretical memos to articulate the categories.

Data analysis in the grounded theory method is conducted concurrently with data collection. The first codebook was made on the 6th of March. Then I did another round of coding, comparison, categorizing, mapping and memo-writing. The codebook was updated with codes from more field notes on the 16th of April. By June 2012, there were 114 pages of field notes data. I was not getting a lot of new information by coding line-by-line. I thus began to vary the way that I coded.

I began using a mix of line-by-line and incident-by-incident coding. Incident-by-incident coding is where I compare each incident in the data to my conceptualization of incidents coded earlier. For incidents that I saw repeated across field notes, I began to write them onto note-cards so that I had groups of each incident on each note-card. Example of incidents included *put shoes away*, *changing rituals* and *should not make any noise during meditation*. Sometimes, when an incident is not something I have seen in my other data sets, I would resume line-by-line coding. Whenever I felt I was overwhelmed

by the data, I would reflect on the basic question in grounded theory research "what is happening here" (Glaser, 1978) to try to make sense of what I was seeing.

Interviews

After seven months of participant observation, I had informal conversations and my own interpretations of the happenings at Buddhist groups. To achieve *verstehen* -- understanding why US-Americans do what they do when adopting Buddhism -- I needed to interview some US-American Buddhists. However, I hesitated to conduct formal interviews with the people I met and I hesitated to acknowledge my hesitance to proceed with the next phase of the research. At this point, the emphasis on deep reflexive methods in the ontology of the Four Seasons of Ethnography allowed me to face the obstacle to research with naked clarity.

While I was doing participant observation in the spring of 2012, I was also enrolled in a Four Seasons of Ethnography graduate seminar. One of the activities during the seminar was to reflect on Carl Jung's concept of the *shadow* in terms of how it relates to one's work. Shadows are the parts of our psyche that we carry but are socialized to see as undesirable to our self-image (Zweig & Abrams, 1990). In discussion with de la Garza, one of the insights that emerged at that time was the importance of "perfection" to my self-image. After simmering in that insight for several months, I can now see, in retrospect, that I began the project with an image of the "perfect interviewee"—Julia Roberts as Elizabeth Gilbert—someone who would have interesting things to tell me about identity, place and material culture. In the first seven months of fieldwork, I had been waiting for this perfect person to arrive. As a retrospective accounting of the research process, it is accurate to say that I began interviewing when I thought I had

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found my perfect interviewee—Padma from Texas Theravada—who was recommended to me through my professor.

Padma was converting to be a Buddhist nun. In my mind, this was the most serious extent changing one's identity because of Buddhism. Padma was setting up her own Buddhist center in Texas; I thus assumed that she will be able to tell me a lot about the role of place and material culture in her process of learning to become a Buddhist. I had an illusion of the US-American Buddhist and this person was Padma.

Midway through our interview, Padma started to tell me her personal reasons for coming to Buddhism. Deaths in the family had set her thinking about the meaning of life. As I listened to Padma, my illusions about what it might mean to be Buddhist in America dropped away. I noticed the person sitting across from me with whom I was having an inter-View (Kvale, 1996). I was ashamed of my stereotype of the US-American Buddhist and started to listen with curiosity. Who is my interviewee and what is important to her?

When I returned from my trip to Texas, I began coding the interview transcripts and field notes. By this time, I had moved from line-by-line coding to almost completely doing incident-by-incident coding. After my interview with Padma, I had more questions about what it meant to set up a Buddhist center in America, what the journey was like to become Buddhist in America and how US-Americans viewed Buddhism. I knew of two individuals who were in similar life-situations as Padma-- Sandra of Phoenix Kagyu and Justin of Arizona Kagyu. Like Padma, both were long-time Buddhists. Both had strong relationships with their Buddhist teacher. Both were in the process of converting their property into a Buddhist center. I interviewed Sandra to understand the process of setting

up a Buddhist center as well as to collect her story about her journey into and her relationship with Buddhism. Justin declined my invitation to participate in the study.

Sampling and Interview Process

I conducted formal interviews with six individuals who were adopting Buddhism into their lives. Interviewees were gathered through convenience sampling. The main criteria for choosing interviewees was (1) they were US-American, (2) they were learning about Buddhism and (3) they had adopted some aspect of Buddhism into their life (e.g., ritual, meditation, Buddhist name, etc.) Table 3 displays the list of individuals I interviewed and how they were located.

Table 3

List of Interviewees (with Pseudonyms)

Interviewee	Affiliation	How this interviewee was located
Padma	Texas Theravada	Introduced by professor
Bhante	Texas Theravada	Padma's teacher
Charles	Texas Theravada	Volunteer at Texas Theravada
Lorenzo	Arizona Theravada	Met at meditation class
Sandra	Phoenix Kagyu	Met at weekend retreat with Arizona Kagyu
Susan	Arizona Kagyu	Introduced by Sandra

All the interviews were conducted face-to-face. They were recorded with the interviewee's permission on a digital recorder and I transcribed the interviews myself as many foreign terms were used during the interviews, e.g., names of deities, rituals, practices, monks, etc. Each interview lasted approximately an hour and a half. Interviews were conducted either at the interviewee's home, Buddhist center or at a public coffee

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shop. Interviewees were assigned a pseudonym even when they approved that their actual names be used so as to protect the confidentiality of their responses.

I had approached eight people for interviews and was turned down by two of them. As mentioned earlier, one of those who rejected my request for interview was Justin, a long-time practitioner who had recently converted his office space into a Buddhist center. He was a new Buddhist teacher, leading his own group. The second person was a long-time practitioner who had served at a Buddhist temple for twelve years, in charge of preparing the shrine for rituals and taking care of the monks. Both individuals declined to be interviewed citing the need for privacy for themselves as well as for their families.

As required by IRB protocol, each interviewee was provided with an information sheet with a description of the dissertation project and the contact information of my dissertation co-chair. After the interviews, I took pictures of the layout and décor of the Buddhist centers that my interviewees owned / operated with a digital camera. Where relevant, I also made pictures of Buddhist objects that my interviewees shared with me during the interview (e.g., books, craftwork, shrine, pictures of teachers, etc.). As was the case with participant observation, I was not quite sure which information would turn out to be most significant to my study at the end of the day. Thus, once again, I recorded as much as I could, in as many forms as I could.

As part of IRB protocol, interviewees signed a photo release form in the event that I should publish these pictures. After the interviews were transcribed, I emailed a copy of the transcripts to my interviewees. In the interview transcripts, I inserted pictures that I made of objects at the meditation center, shrine, etc. that were spoken of during the

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interview. The pictures thus provided context for the text and added an element of visual storytelling to the transcript. In my email to the interviewees, I also included the questions that I had as I was transcribing the interviews. Sometimes, I had questions about the spelling of teachers' names, ritual names, deity names or books and places. I included those questions in my email as well.

As a token of appreciation, I presented each interviewee with a hand-made bracelet that looked like the Buddhist bracelets back in Asia. I got inspiration for this idea from one of the Buddhist centers where I was doing participant observation. One evening, during meditation, a member of the meditation group took ten minutes of our time to sell some Buddhist rosary necklaces that he made. He made these rosary necklaces himself. I bought one of his necklaces as a gift for a friend and he gave me a bracelet for free. We chatted about potentially making similar bracelets for my project but the cost was prohibitive. So, I bought materials from the local craft store and made my own bracelets. I first did some research online on Buddhist bracelets and began to string brown-wooden beads together such that they looked similar to the ones found online. Once again, unsure if this information would be useful, I recorded the steps and thoughts in my process of making these beads as interview incentives.

Interview Guide

The interview guide that I used in Texas was created based on coding the first sets of participant observation field notes. When I was coding my field notes, I noticed that the Buddhist Centers that I visited were adopting rituals, chants and ornaments that were similar to the Buddhist temples that I visited back in Singapore. However, some modifications were made to the rituals and chants in America such that they were not

entirely the same as those in Singapore and Tibet. For example, some Buddhist centers here translated their chants into English; others kept the chants in the Pali language or the Sanskrit language. Some Buddhist centers here used flowers and lit candles as offerings to the Buddha; other Buddhist centers used Lindt chocolate and plugged in electric candles as offerings. Thus, two of the codes that I consistently saw in my field notes were *cultural appropriation* (adopting rituals and ornaments found in Asia) and *modification / change of tradition* (changing rituals and practices found in Asia). What I could not determine from participant observation was how and when Buddhists in America would decide to adopt the practices that were done in Asia. In addition, I was puzzled by why and when they would decide to change the rituals and practices done in Asia.

My first interview guide, written just prior to my trip to Texas, was thus focused on trying to understand the appropriation of rituals, artifacts and practices from Asian Buddhism. Questions included: Has the way you practice the ritual changed from what you were taught? What does it mean when someone changes a ritual or tradition? What does changing a tradition mean to you? I began each section in the interview guide with *grand tour questions* (Spradley, 1979) such as "would you show me your Buddhist center or shrine?" and "what are some Buddhist things you do every day?"

To ensure that I had thought through each interview thoroughly, I wrote probe questions as suggested by Kvale (1996). These probes focused on getting examples, further details, and elaborations. In addition, during the interviews, I used Kvale's (1996) recommendation of creating follow-up questions by repeating significant words, unfamiliar terms, or terms spoken with an unusually strong intonation so as to get further elaboration. Of the various types of questions that I tried, I found Spradley's (1979)

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recommendation on *native-language questions* to be particularly useful. Interviewees

tended to become vague in their responses with regards to religious experience. In these

instances, I asked my interviewees to think about synonyms or situations where they

would use the same term so that I could better understand articulations such as "we made

an energetic connection" or "it just made sense to me." My first interview guide is

attached at the end of this report, as Appendix A.

After I transcribed the field notes and interviews from my trip to Texas, I coded

them. Then I arranged to interview Sandra because her experience with Buddhism was

comparable to Padma's. Like Padma, Sandra had been practicing Buddhism for over 10

years. Like Padma, Sandra is offering up her home to Buddhism and turning it into a

Buddhist Center. My intention was to minimize the differences between the data points.

Doing so increases the possibility that the researcher can collect as much data on a

theoretical category while at the same time, spotting important differences not caught in

earlier data collection (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 55).

When analyzing the codes from my interviews in Texas, I realized that there were

questions that I should have asked to follow up on the information I provided. The ways

that I phrased or conceived of my questions were not the same as how Padma narrated

her journey into Buddhism. Some things I had assumed to be important, she found

obtuse. I therefore refined my interview guide for Sandra's interview. I added a section

on issues with local religion (e.g., How different is Buddhism from the religion that you

grew up with? Do you see any parallels between your previous religion and Buddhism?

How do you think people in your previous religion would view Buddhists?). I also added

questions on identifying one's home as a Buddhist Center (i.e., how did you decide to

begin this Buddhist Center? What were the major decisions you had to make? Did you

have to inform the neighbors? How did you explain it to them?).

       With each interviewee, I repeated this process of transcribing, coding, analysis,

and then refining the interview guide. Using this process, I was able to craft an interview

sequence that was closer to how US-American Buddhists narrated their experience with

Buddhism. There was usually a story about how they began with Buddhism. There were

usually stories about important people, such as the teacher or a close friend. There were

usually stories about life-changing events that contributed to why and how they made the

life choices that they did. The revised interview guide from the final interview is attached

at the end of this document as Appendix B.

Coding

      I coded the interview transcripts using incident-by-incident coding. I wrote each

incident mentioned in the transcripts onto a new note-card. When there were similar

incidents mentioned between interviews, I wrote these incidents on the same note-card.

To keep as closely grounded to the data as possible, I labeled each note-card either with

an *in-vivo code* (e.g., "it made sense to me") or with the incident-type (e.g., meeting the

teacher for the first time). I then compared incident-by-incident across interviews. I also

compared the codes from interview data with codes from past observation data. In

addition, I conducted a few more participant observation visits in June, July and August. I

then compared the new observation data with my previous observation data and with the

interview data. My most recent list of codes is derived from coding and analysis of 173

pages of field notes and 103 pages of interview transcript.

Writing and Analysis

The grounded theory method of analysis relies on the theoretical sensitivity (Glaser, 1978) of the researcher to discover concepts from the data. This means that it is possible for different scholars to see different concepts and theories as being relevant and important when reviewing a common set of data, based on the theoretical perspective and preparation of the researcher. In writing my analysis, I use Gutkind's yellow-test for creative nonfiction (2008, p. 141) to create a text that will allow the reader, based on their own theoretical sensitivity, to hear how their own theories and concepts speak to the text.

Gutkind (2008) recommends that researchers convey information through scenes as people remember information better when they are conveyed in narrative form. Scenes are the building blocks of narratives. Gutkind (2008) describes the "yellow-test" to help researchers recognize if they are indeed writing in scenes:

> Take a highlighter and yellow in the scenes… … if half your essay, more or less, is not glaring and blaring back at you in yellow, that's a red flag, a warning that your essay may not be infused with enough narrative to compel a reader onwards. The yellow test is a way of establishing that the writer is telling a story, showing rather than telling in as cinematic and intriguing a way as possible (p. 141)

My analysis begins with a chapter that displays my data in creative nonfiction (CNF) form, as informed by Gutkind's yellow test for creative-nonfiction writing. This is followed by another chapter of analysis (Chapter Four) where I expand upon the CNF text with excerpts from my field-notes and interview transcripts to support the concepts and properties identified in the CNF. Chapter Four will explain the categories, their

properties, how the categories/ properties relate to each other as well as how these

categories are useful to other intercultural communication researchers.

Chapter 3

THE PARACULTURAL IMAGINARY

Buddhist sutras[7] often begin with the phrase: "Thus I have heard." This is because these sutras are not written by the Buddha but by students who attended the seminars that the Buddha held. "Thus I have heard" warns the reader that what they are reading is a record of what has been said, based on a person's memory. If so, then this chapter should begin with the warning: "Thus I have seen."

Heterophily as Cosplay

"Performing as a Buddhist"

Figure 3.1. Properties of Heterophily as Cosplay

Property (a) Looks like Buddhism

Property (b) Dressing like a Buddhist

Property (c) Sounds like Buddhism

Property (d) Moving like a Buddhist

Black robes extending from shoulder to ankle differentiate the regulars from the newbies. The regulars converse softly at the verandah of the Zen temple, wearing long cotton robes that look like dresses held together with a cloth belt at the waist. A few of the men have shaved heads and chins. They could probably pass as monks in their robes.

We, the newbies, stand together in our colorful street clothes; strangers gathered awkwardly together at the porch of the *zendo* (meditation hall). The yard in front of us is

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[7] *Sutra* is the term for "traditional" Buddhist texts, especially that which is used in the Theravada tradition. The Buddhist religion can be divided, broadly speaking, into three major traditions -- the Theravada tradition, the Mahayana tradition and the Vajrayana tradition. The Theravada tradition is different from the other traditions in that it prides itself in recording what the Buddha "actually said" to his students

decorated with several white stone Buddhas, each of them sitting in meditation in the nooks and crannies between the trees and bushes. A string of inch-high paper lanterns painted with ink calligraphy hang from the roof of the temple. To the far left, at eye-level, is a plaque with the Chinese characters 人心直指 carved into the wood. This set of characters is the third phrase of a four-part saying used in Zen Buddhism. However, in Zen Buddhism, the characters are typically reversed to read 直指人心.

Not that anyone is paying attention to the difference in phrasing at this temple. The plaque stays in the background of the scene, much like the lanterns -- ornamental objects that adorn the scene but do not speak and are not seen. One could easily imagine being in a Zen temple in Japan or China if not for the white people in their black robes, chatting softly in groups of threes and fours. The rain has stopped and droplets hang from trees. We are all waiting now, fellow meditators on a cool Sunday morning.

The person-in-charge is an elderly lady. A full head of white hair neatly frames her bright sparkling eyes. She extends a steady, present gaze and her right hand to welcome me to beginner's orientation at Arizona Zen. One might half-expect her to introduce herself as a Mary, Margaret or Susan; instead she says "Hi, I'm Teishan."

The deep-tone of a meditation bell summons the black robes from across the yard. The sound of quick footsteps is mixed with that of cloth rubbing against cloth. In the meditation space of the zendo, the regulars' movements slow into a rhythmic regularity. First person enters the zendo. Bow at the door. Pick a seat. In front of seat, bow; close eyes; make prayer hands. Climb onto seat; shuffle robes; fluff pillows. Cross your legs. Left palm on top of the right. Close your eyes. Repeat for the second person. Enter the zendo. Bow at the door. Pick a seat. In front of seat, bow; close eyes; make prayer hands.

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Climb onto seat; shuffle robes; fluff pillows. Cross your legs. Place your left palm over the right. Close your eyes. Repeat for the nth person.[8]

Wooden clappers sound. End of meditation. Take your meditation pillow off your cushion. Now lay the pillow on the ground. Bow to the people in front of you. Now get on your knees, put your chest to the ground; the back of your hands to the ground; your forehead to the pillow. Palms up, lift your fingers to point behind you. Stand and repeat two more times.

There is to be no talking. Bow to the people in front of you. Now get on your knees, put your chest to the ground; the back of your hands to the ground; your forehead to the pillow. Palms up, lift your fingers to point behind you.

Bow to the people in front of you. Now get on your knees, put your chest to the ground; the back of your hands to the ground; your forehead to the pillow. Palms up, lift your fingers to point behind you. Good job. Now we go for tea. Now we can talk.

*   *   *

An Asian face flashes by during tea break after meditation -- short black hair and brown Southeast Asian complexion, eyes that do not meet mine. The Asian man does not speak to anyone. The white people are discussing Buddhism. They are asking each other questions and providing answers to each other. The white people are speaking among themselves. Just like how the white people are doing the rituals and the teaching in the zendo. Asian artifacts are everywhere but where is the *inter*-cultural in this scene?

Each time I see the Asian man in the crowd of regular meditators he quickly becomes invisible, hidden by the black robes of Zen meditation. The emotions that run

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[8] Source: Arizona Zen (fieldnotes) Sunday Meditation, p. 2 - 6

through me are a complicated mix of comfort and discomfort. I take comfort in the ostentatious display of culturally familiar (read: Asian) signs and symbols. The extensive adoption and display of material artifacts from Asia make me feel welcomed in the Buddhist space. Looking at the material artifacts around me, I read an interest in culture, an embracing of culture and I infer from these, an openness to culture. There is, however, something intuitively disconcerting about the contrasting absence of Other bodies and Other voices at the temple. In this void, I hear a silence, a wall, when I am trying to understand the nature of intercultural exchange that is taking place in the transfer of cultural traditions in the domain of religion/spirituality. I am disturbed and confused by the difference between what I see and what I feel. What is happening here?

Scenes similar to the above are replicated in the other Buddhist groups where I conducted participant observation. Groups of white-Caucasian Americans are practicing cultural traditions adopted from Asian countries such as Japan, Tibet, and Sri Lanka. We usually gather in rooms ornamented with religious objects from Asian countries such as Tibet, Japan, Thailand and India. Conversations between in-group members are peppered with the occasional Japanese, Sanskrit, Pali or Tibetan term. In addition, some US-American spiritual followers adopt Chinese or Tibetan Buddhist names when doing Buddhism.

Given US-American spiritual followers' extensive adoption of Buddhist religious/spiritual aesthetics and rituals from Asian countries such as Japan, Tibet and Sri Lanka, I assumed at the beginning of my project that Asian culture/people would somehow be relevant to the participants of US-American Buddhism at these temples. Perhaps US-Americans who are learning the religious traditions of Asia would be

enthusiastic to engage with Asian people? Perhaps they would define their identities in relation to some country in Asia? What *exactly* is their interest in Asian culture?

Cultural Universalization

"*Removing Culture from Buddhism*"

Figure 3.2. Properties of Cultural Universalization

Property (a) Translating into the Local

Property (b) Reducing to Common Denominator

Property (c) Comparing with Science

She disappears into a room and appears at the French doors that lead out to the patio. We make a left at the yard, towards a wooden shed on the far left corner. Susan lowers herself through the doorframe. "They built this very quickly, in a day or so; it was all I could afford at that time," she explained. "I saved up for this," she added. [9]

Pictures of famous Tibetan Buddhist teachers -- Padmasambhava, the Dalai Lama, the Karmapa, Mingyur Rinpoche, Garchen Rinpoche, etc. -- greeted us as we entered the small space that was barely 8 feet tall and 5 feet wide. The walls were filled with pictures and tangkars. A thick oriental rug covered the floorboards and a Tibetan door-curtain covered the door.

"A friend of mine gave me this (Tibetan door-curtain). I forget where she bought it. This is the eight auspicious symbols and then the (explanation sheet on) top is about what's in there… … This is very Asian because a lot of these symbols resonate or came up in the Asian countries. But I suspect as Buddhism continues in this country, that we

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[9] Source: Interview transcript, p. 19

will have our own auspicious symbols that are more, you know, contemporary," Susan explains. The room smells like still air and wood. The wood panels were raw, not painted over. Warm orange lamps give the space a peaceful, homely glow. The air-conditioner, a small wall unit, rumbles loudly, slowly cooling down the room as we speak.

Susan has been a Buddhist practitioner for over twenty years and she currently leads a meditation group at her teacher's Buddhist center. She explains her process of learning about Buddhism: "You know when I was younger, I just had the insatiable desire to learn and I would read and read and read… and I just read so many books, you know… … it was like a passion! Oh, I gotta understand this and I gotta understand that…… I was very excited about it. I was like a kid in a candy store."

"Have you always been interested in other cultures? Is that what this is about?" I ask, trying to understand why Susan was so motivated to learn the foreign terms used in Buddhist texts, such as Vajrayana and Bodhisattva.

"(What attracted me to Buddhism) …wasn't the culture. It was the philosophy. The philosophy could be here or anywhere. It happens to have germinated in India and then it has gone to Japan and China and Tibet and all these different places. But it has come to the west also. And the wonderful thing about Buddhism is that as it comes to a different place it will adopt the culture of the people that it is with."

"So, in terms of Buddhism coming from a different country… is that something that is important to you? Does it matter?" I ask, pushing from another angle to try to make sense of her interest in adopting the religious spirituality of another culture.

"That it comes from a foreign country? No, doesn't matter to me at all. I mean, it does matter in the sense that we are developing a western Buddhism. We are not

changing the teachings of the Buddha but we are putting it into our culture. I like that. You know, I don't want to adopt another culture. I'm not interested in that. But the fact that it came from another culture to me is irrelevant because the way I look at it is that we are all human and we are all going to be dead. We all have to use the toilet. I mean, we are all the same regardless of our culture. We all have moments of happiness. We all suffer a great deal. So this unites us in many ways. That's the way I look at it," she said.

What is happening here? An intercultural communication puzzle presents itself. Susan builds a meditation shed to practice Buddhist religious/spiritual rituals and she fills her meditation space with Asian religious artifacts. Yet she says that she is not interested in Asian culture. She minimizes cultural difference by reducing human life to bodily functions (e.g., we are going to die anyway; we all need to use the toilet). At the same time, there is recognition of cultural difference via creating a hierarchy between cultures, e.g., our cultural forms will be more contemporary than Asian cultural forms. On top of that, Susan says is not interested in adopting Asian culture. She sees her actions as creating a new cultural form.

The first three stages of ethnocentrism in Milton Bennett's (1986; 1993) Development Model of Intercultural Sensitivity coalesce into one and my mind goes into overdrive. Foreign culture is simultaneously acknowledged and waved aside; centered and decentered. The assumptions that I began the project with -- that (1) US-Americans who were learning Buddhist religious/spiritual traditions were interested in Asian cultures; and (2) US-Americans' adoption of Buddhist religious/spiritual traditions was a sign that they were so open to a culture that they were willing to change themselves to become cultural marginals (J. Bennett, 1993)-- did not appear to fit with Susan's lived

experience of adopting Buddhism. Susan redefines her experience of adopting Asian

Buddhist traditions as one of creating a new culture rather than appropriating an existing

cultural form. In one fell swoop, she takes the culture out of Buddhism. She is not

interested in culture! What is happening here?!

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

It is the first day of Noble Eightfold path class at Arizona Theravada. Leonard, the

teacher, explains what Buddhism is to the new students: "You don't need to be Buddhist

at all to benefit from this class… Buddhism is not a religion; it is human nature. It is

individual responsibility. The most profound thing about Buddhism is the realization of

our true nature. It is a clear realization of who we are. The Buddha wasn't teaching

Buddhism but aspects of nature."[10]

Leonard continues: "The Buddha was born a Hindu person but he brought it back

to aspects of nature. He saw a spiritual life as bringing it back to the people. The Buddha

had everything that he could have wanted, as a prince. Ideal education, friends, maids,

etc. In todays' world, you can say that he had everything that we have. We have it easy,

in fact. We live a luxurious life here in the US, very much like the Buddha. But that's not

what happiness is and the Buddha realized that."

"In this class, we will provide an explanation of Buddhism in the Western

language and so what we are getting is a Western Buddhism," Leonard says. He refers us

to page 17 of the class textbook to understand the primary points of meditation. "This

book is very friendly because it doesn't read like a Buddhist book." Leonard goes on to

explain what Buddhist meditation is. "The Buddha perfected the practice of meditation.

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[10] Source: Arizona Thereavada (fieldnotes) First Class, p.2

When we meditate, our thoughts go all over the place. With meditation, we rein them in. You can think about it like we are corralling our thoughts, as if they were horses."

"So, why do we do all this?" Leonard goes on to persuade his new students on the benefit of studying Buddhism. "To find lasting happiness, or in other words, what we can truly hang on to in this life. What we are doing in this class is to cultivate wisdom and our view of things. There are different aspects of how we can find this lasting happiness. We can see it through understanding how a child looks at happiness -- through things that give quick happiness and fulfill short-lived sensual desires. In adulthood, we begin to ignore the unhappiness in our lives. What we end up doing is developing habitual patterns that provide happiness or what we think is happiness. We begin to think that our addictions provide happiness! We need to find a way to let it go, to let go of the things that are not necessary rather than to think of it as adding new habits."

"The only thing to do is to cultivate clear understanding. Just bring back that true nature that we already have. There is a clear, still compassionate us. We will see it once we do away with the veil. There is the Christ inside, a Godlike nature, a Buddha nature. We will discover a type of oneness that feels like we are in love with everything. The opening of the veil is the start of spiritual seeking."

As I compare field-note to field-note, interview to interview, and interviews to field-notes, I begin to see why the subaltern does not speak even when in a setting filled with symbols, artifacts, rituals and philosophies from its own culture. The subaltern does not speak because the subaltern cannot speak. The subaltern cannot speak because even though the symbols are borrowed from their culture, the symbols have taken on new signification. The artifacts and terms from Asian Buddhisms are re-spoken in the

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dominant discourse of white-Caucasian Americans. Culture is taken out of Buddhism. The discourse, interpretation and voice of the cultural Other is thereby muted.

Further, instead of describing the transfer of religious/spiritual philosophies and practices from East to West as a form of cultural adoption, US-American spiritual followers are re-defining their experience of Buddhist religion/spirituality as one of cultural creation. They see themselves as *creating* an American Buddhism rather than *adopting* an Asian Buddhism. For US-American spiritual followers who see cultural transfer in this way, what sorts of communication behaviors do they manifest? What are the dynamics of intercultural exchange in this instance?

Passive Heterophilous Communication

"*Learning Buddhism by Ourselves*"

Figure 3.3. Properties of Passive Heterophilous Communication

    Property (a) Engaging with Texts on Foreign Culture

    Property (b) Consulting within the Community

    Property (c) Foreign Culture Makes Sense

Similar to the congregation at Arizona Zen, the students at Arizona Theravada were also predominantly of white-Caucasian ethnicity. There were about ten students in the meditation room at Arizona Theravada for beginner's Buddhist class one evening. Sitting cross-legged, backs straight, we listened to Leonard, the teacher, give meditation instructions. Seated across from us, was Bhante, a trained monk in the Sri Lankan tradition of Buddhism. The Sri Lankan tradition of Theravada Buddhism is known for preserving the Buddha's teachings in the Pali language. Bhante's role was to sing the

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chants at the end of the meditation session in Pali, after the group has sung the chants in English. The students were seated in three rows on thin brown squares of meditation cushion on a parquet floor.[11]

The meditation technique for the night was breathing meditation, the most basic of meditation techniques in Buddhism. Leonard begins his explanation. In breathing meditation, one places one's awareness at the space just in front of the nostrils, above the lip. Stay here, watch this space. Feel how the cool air is entering your nostrils into your body. Notice the gap between the in-breath and the out-breath. Feel the warm air as it leaves your body gradually from your nostrils. Watch it gently. Do not try to control or manipulate the breath. Watch the breath like you would a butterfly. Watch the breath lightly. Engage your curiosity. Simply breathe and watch, breathe and watch.

Leonard continues to explain: A common experience when watching the breath is forgetting that one is watching the breath. One might begin by enthusiastically watching the breath and the next moment of awareness comes after waking from a long internal monologue about what to do over the weekend. Or one might be thinking about breathing one moment and then move on to thinking about a conversation that happened earlier in the day. When your attention strays, bring it back to home base. Bring it back to the breath. A method we could use to keep our concentration during meditation is to count the breath. With the out-breath, we count "one" then wait for the in-breath to happen. At the beginning of the next out-breath we count "two" and so on and so forth. Counting gives us something to do while observing our breathing, and therefore assists in our ability to concentrate.

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[11] Source: Arizona Theravada (Fieldnotes), June 13, p. 4

Sometimes, one might forget the number of breaths one has taken. A way to keep track of how many sets of ten you have breathed is to use mala beads. These are strings of wooden beads, much like the Catholic rosary. Usually, 108 brown or dark red beads are strung together with black or red thread. One could also get a smaller version of the Mala beads that would go around the wrist.

"Doesn't *mala* mean wreath in *Pali*?" asks Paul, a recent Buddhist enthusiast who has been to the temple frequently for the last couple of months. A long pause. Leonard the meditation teacher asks Paul if he would repeat his question. "Doesn't mala mean wreath or rosary in *Pali*?" Leonard smiles but does not reply. Paul did not direct his question to Bhante, even when no answer was forthcoming from Leonard. Leonard the meditation teacher chose to keep silent instead of asking for Bhante's expertise.

I thought it was odd that Leonard and Paul "did not see" Bhante in the room. Bhante was an expert on the Pali language. Why would Leonard ignore Bhante's views on technical knowledge and expertise, yet be enthusiastic about getting Bhante to sing the Pali chants at the end of the meditation practice? As I read into what is (not) said in this scene, the social hierarchies between attendees at the American Buddhist events begin to reveal themselves. First, there is a hierarchy between teacher and student. The Buddhist teacher is the person accorded the power to define what Buddhism is for the group.

Second, there is an ethnic hierarchy in the scene. In the blindness of the white-Caucasian spiritual followers to the cultural expert in the scene, in the silence of the Sri Lankan monk in fading into the background, and in my own silence in not speaking up, I feel the embodied texture of ethnic hierarchies that quantitative scholars (see e.g., Hagendoorn, 1993) have been measuring for years but never qualitatively described.

The white-Caucasian American definition is preferred when there is a question about Buddhism. Cultural Others are not included as equal conversation partners. There is a subtle prejudice in this scene. Contrary to the assumptions that I began this project with, the data was forcing me to see the ways in which the Asian person is not relevant to the white-Caucasian American adoption of Buddhist religious/spiritual traditions. The cultures that can speak and whose members are spoke to are higher up in the hierarchy. The cultures that sit silently in complicit deference reify their subordinate placement. The silence is smothering but I tell myself that I am giving face to those who are present by keeping quiet. The habitual concern with *face-saving* functions as hegemonizing ideology that silences my courage to speak up and naturalizes a habitual self-subordination.

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

"Mala probably means rosary because the malasana means rosary pose," the lady sitting directly in front of me breaks the silence. Throughout the meditation session, she has been sitting in perfect Burmese-style meditation pose, forming a neat "W" with her legs by pressing her calves against her thighs. Leonard repeats part of what she just said, like it was a question rather than a response.

The lady goes into an elaborate explanation of how she had taken up yoga recently and there was a pose that they did at her yoga studio that gave her this idea. They called the technique the malasana pose. "You see, the hands go around the torso like a rosary wrapping around the body." She rises from her seat to demonstrate the yoga pose to the class. She begins by squatting in front of her meditation cushion. She then wraps both her hands around her ankles, curling her back such that her chin rests on her knees. Hugging herself, she says slowly and dramatically "mala-sana." Leonard nods and agrees

with her. Yes, mala probably means rosary. The class then moved on to discuss other matters. They saw no need to consult other sources for their understanding of the meaning of the term "mala."[12]

<center>*   *   *</center>

Intercultural communication is traditionally defined as communication with others who are unalike ourselves (Gudykunst & Mody2002). Intercultural communication studies focus on theorizing about the interactions between individuals from different cultural backgrounds. It is taken-for-granted in current intercultural communication scholarship that interaction between cultures involves direct communication between persons (see e.g., Collier & Thomas, 1988). However, listening closely to my data, I begin to question the received notion that intercultural communication studies should primarily focus on direct, in-person communication with the cultural Other. What other forms of intercultural communication are as valid and important for further research?

In the mala-sana scene just described above, I saw how intercultural communication (as it is traditionally defined) *did not* take place directly with cultural Others in the scene. That being said, American spiritual followers were still having an inter-cultural experience because foreign culture was central to their communication interaction. How so? First, the reason why white-Caucasian American spiritual followers are gathered together is to practice the forms and rituals of the cultural Other. Second, the central figure in the white-Caucasian American spiritual followers' discussions of Buddhist religion/spirituality is their peer whom they have elected to be their teacher.

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[12] There are two versions of the term "mala" in Sanskrit. One with a short "a" (pronounced muh-luh); the other is with long "a" (pronounced mah-lah). The former means "district" whereas the former means wreath, garland or crown (Richard Rosen, personal communication, February 2013).

A peer-group member becomes the teacher of the group because s/he knows about Buddhist religion/spirituality having learned these rituals and philosophies from Asian Buddhist teachers. The peer-teacher's previous interaction with Asian Buddhist teachers authenticates her position in the community as the person who knows about issues of Buddhist religion/spirituality. It is in this sense that the cultural Other is essential to the communication interactions that these homophilous populations are engaged in.

However, in observing the bodies that are in the scene, the cultural Other is not relevant to American spiritual followers' adoption of Buddhist religion/spirituality. These observations call for a more complicated understanding of the embodied dynamics of intercultural interaction. How do we theorize about the communication interactions where cultural foreignness is essential to the interaction but persons from that culture are not necessary to the communication interaction? What is happening here?

Heterophily as Simulacra

"Following the Follower"

Figure 3.4. Properties of Heterophily as Simulacra

Property (a) He knows more than I do

Property (b) Lets' see what happens

Property (c) I have never seen it before

Property (d) Do whatever you want

There was a question about meditation for Leonard the teacher. How do you do meditation? Leonard says: "We can just close our eyes and do meditation or we can sometimes also use objects to help us. For example the mala-bracelet." He shows the class the bracelet that he has on his wrist. "This has 28 beads but there are other kinds."

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A lady seated to Leonard's left immediately begin to play with the mala-bracelet on her wrist. The other ladies around her begin to openly stare at her playing with her bracelet. The lady playing with the bracelet does not look at them. She only looks at the teacher, a wide smile breaks open and remains freeze-framed on her face for a very long time.[13]

One week later, when we meet for the second class, every other person seemed to have a mala-bracelet, or a mala-necklace or multiple mala-things hanging off of their body. For example, look at the lady sitting to the right of the door. She is sitting with her knees propped up, black ankle socks with white polka dots and a small black bow peeking out of her sweat pants. A light orange long string of mala beads is carelessly strewn to her left. Now look at the row of meditation cushions next to her. There is a thin white woman with stringy blond straight hair who wears a black mala bracelet on her right wrist. Next to her is the large white woman from the last class, the one who had the mala-bracelet that everyone was looking at enviously. Today she is wearing many accessories on both arms. On the right arm is a long string of black mala beads. Above it is another accessory. On the left arm are shiny small things that look like they belong to two or even three different bracelets. In the next row down is a lady with downcast eyes with worry lines along the mouth. She wears no accessories and everything about her is plain and non-descript. The person next to hear wears a black mala bracelet on her right hand. The next person also wears a string of mala bracelet on her right hand. [14]

Cultural heterophily spreads throughout homophilous communities rapidly, like how the flu spreads in a college classroom. The mala breads do not necessarily signify that one is practicing meditation regularly or that one actually needs or uses mala beads

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[13] Source: Arizona Theravada (fieldnotes) First Class, p. 3
[14] Source: Arizona Theravada (fieldnotes) Second Class, p. 1 – 2

for one's meditation. Instead, the mala beads are a signifier that one is now a practitioner of the Buddhist religious/spiritual traditions. Religious artifacts of the Other such as the mala beads in this case are used to performatively authenticate the religious/spiritual identity of US-American spiritual followers.

<div align="center">*   *   *</div>

Thus I have seen at Arizona Theravada. The new guy was a young man from Maine. He strolled into meditation class late, worn-out flip-flops scratching against the clean parquet floor of the meditation hall. Wearing a thin grey t-shirt and casual Bermuda shorts, he looked like he was going to the beach rather than to a religious gathering. [15]

Leonard's mouth hung open as he stared at the beach sandals. Footwear was not allowed in the meditation hall. Leonard looked like he was about to say something but no sound emerged. In fact, nobody said anything about the transgression. The lady across from me had a kind frozen smile on her face. She looked scary, like one of the demure, fuss-less Stepford wives. Another man stared openly at the slippers and then looked decidedly in the opposite direction. Nobody said anything.

The diffusion of foreign religious/spiritual traditions into homophilous communities manifests as a whimsical adoption of behavioral norms. US-American spiritual followers decide which behavioral norms of a foreign culture they want to adopt, how they want to adopt it as well as when they will and will not to enforce it. The manner in which foreign cultural norms are practiced in homophilous communities demonstrates a *self-centric approach* to intercultural relations.

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[15] Arizona Thereavada (fieldnotes) June 13, p. 3 – 4

For those who operate from a self-centric approach towards relationships with other cultural groups, what is most important in determining the form of intercultural exchange is what one wants from the intercultural interaction. How a particular ritual used to be practiced in another country is not relevant. What is more relevant for those who operate from a self-centric approach is how *they* want to practice the cultural tradition that they have appropriated for themselves.

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The beginner's meditation class at Arizona Zen always ends with the chanting of some Buddhist scriptures.[16] Leonard passes around a stack of small green chant book. Everyone in the room takes a copy. We chant the Lotus Sutra (*Karaniya Metta Sutta*) in English. Then Bhante clears his throat and sings the same scripture in the Pali language. When Bhante begins his chant, the Jewish student and the older Asian student in the room immediately put their hands to their chest and closed their eyes. The male student next to these two women has his eyes downcast but his eyeballs are darting around. It is as if he wants to see what other people are doing but he does not want other people to know that he is looking. His eyes hang around Paul for a long period of time. Paul, who is also new to Buddhism but has been to the temple for a few months now, sits in meditation position and has his eyes closed. He is not holding his book. He looks like he is meditation. The male student puts down his chant book and looks down. He winces as he looks over at the women with their prayer hands, and then looks down again.

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[16] Source: Arizona Theravada (fieldnotes) June 13, p. 3

At the above Buddhist events for beginners, everyone is trying to follow what everyone else is doing. Cultural forms with fine distinctions between lineages (Theravada, Mahayana, Vajrayana) and Asian countries (Japan, China, Taiwan, Sri Lankan, Tibetan, etc.) is reduced to hodgepodge simulacra (Baudrillard, 1983). US-American spiritual followers end up following what they see others do without necessarily understanding why they are doing what they are doing.

The white-Caucasian American performance of their Buddhist religious/spiritual identity becomes a haphazard mimicry (Bhabha, 1994) of the cultural forms used in Asian Buddhist religious/spiritual traditions. The cultural forms of the cultural Other, as defined by the Other, ceases to exist over time in these homophilous communities because they are re-articulated with new signification in the dominant discourse of the homophilous communities.

Capitalizing on Heterophily

"*Making Ourselves the Teacher*"

Figure 3.5. Properties of Capitalizing on Heterophily

   Property (a) Using Knowledge of the Foreign as Cultural Capital

   Property (b) Using Relationship with Heterophilous Others as Social Capital

The above categories have yet to answer the question -- why are US-American spiritual followers interested in adopting Asian Buddhist religious/spiritual traditions? Why open oneself up to another culture if one is not really interested in another culture? Why adopt the forms of another culture if one is not intending to fully take on all aspects of that culture? Why go through the trouble of intercultural interaction if one could get by

via reading books? The intercultural communication puzzle is still in a tangle. Trying to see through the situation into the hidden and subtle aspects of the embodied dynamics of intercultural interaction, I return to the question -- "what is happening here".

<p align="center">*   *   *</p>

Thus I have seen at Arizona Theravada. Leonard got some attitude from a newbie one time, during one of his beginner's meditation sessions.[17] He was giving instructions for sitting meditation and then walking meditation. He talks about how we should try to walk in a straight line, our own line, when doing walking meditation. He says that when he was in Thailand he could tell which monks were really serious meditators by looking at the ground where they did their walking meditation. If a monk did a lot of walking meditation, there would be a dirt track on the ground because the grass is worn. If the monk walked along that dirt track over and over again, there would be a trough.

One of the new guys made a wise-crack that Thailand could really use some troughs since they are always flooding. Leonard immediately responded that Thailand does in fact have little troughs lining the sides of the roofs to funnel rain-water to the drains. The new guy is impressed and he shuts up. Leonard has thus firmly established himself as the expert in the group on matters related to Thailand.

<p align="center">*   *   *</p>

The group at Arizona Zen is affiliated with a Japanese Zen master who has temples and Buddhist centers all around the world. Joshu, the priest at Arizona Zen, is a student of the Zen master. He went to a retreat with his teacher in December. When he returned, he gave a report to the group at their Sunday meditation session. Although the

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[17] Source: Arizona Thereavada (fieldnotes) June 13, p. 3 – 4

report was supposed to be about the retreat, the focus of the report veered towards

Joshu's personal relationship with Roshi, his Japanese teacher. [18]

Joshu tells the group how fortunate he was to be given the special task of caring

for Roshi's health. Roshi has many students all over the world and Joshu is one of three

select people chosen for this task. This is a significant responsibility given that Roshi is

104 years old. Joshu then relates his personal observation of Roshi's health: "He has a lot

of energy but he is also definitely winding down."

In addition to telling his group about the retreat, Joshu gave an explanation of the

Buddhist concept of *teisho.* It was important to explain the concept of teisho to the group

because Roshi was coming to Arizona in a few weeks to give a teisho. While explaining

what a teisho was, Joshu skillfully included narratives that pointed to his close personal

relationship with the rare 104-year-old Japanese master:

Teisho is not a lecture but more like a transmission. You can get pretty much

similar teachings from other places. The point is not so much the message said or

the words used. The point of a teisho is the transmission -- the mouth-to-ear

conveyance of information from a special teacher to a ready student. A teisho is

more than the words used. What is a teisho? To make a metaphor of the dharma,

Roshi says that a teisho is like the blood flowing through his veins.

On one occasion, I was supposed to see Roshi before he gave one of these teishos.

One of his attendants told me that the Roshi is very weak today. This attendant

suggests that maybe Roshi should not do teisho today? I enter Roshi's room and

see that Roshi is indeed very pale. So I gather the other attendants together and we

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[18] Source: Arizona Zen (fieldnotes) Sunday Meditation, p. 4

try to persuade Roshi that he should rest this morning. We can move teisho to the afternoon so that he gets some rest. We left the room only after he agreed. One of Roshi's attendant stays behind to massage Roshi's feet. This attendant later tells us that within a few moments, Roshi "completely loses consciousness."

That afternoon, Roshi rebuked us for the morning's events. Roshi says that he appreciates the kindness of his attendants but he also thinks that our kindness has turned into a rudeness. When we were advising Roshi not to give teisho, Roshi heard what we were saying but he also knew about other things we didn't know.

Joshu paused and expressed his admiration for his teacher's mystical knowledge.

Roshi said that he was born to give teisho. While his attendants were trying to be kind to tell him to rest, he should be the one to make the final decision to rest. Roshi complained that he was stuck because he couldn't leave the room and even if he could, he didn't have a car to drive to give teisho. Giving teisho brings him a kind of vitality. Teisho is like the blood flowing through his veins.

White-Caucasian Americans who have opened themselves to another culture gain the opportunity to establish themselves in their community as teachers on that foreign culture. The consequence of engaging with another culture is gain in cultural capital that can later be converted to social status when in communication interaction with homophilous others. Intercultural exchange is therefore also the commodification of social relations and cultural knowledge with material consequences in the community.

Negation of Capitalization

"We Are Not Making Money"

Figure 3.6. Properties of Negation of Capitalization

Property (a) Magical Thinking

Property (b) Moral Rightness

Property (c) Damned by Profit

"If there are no more classes, who is sustaining the program? Who pays for everything?" I ask Cameron, the teacher at Arizona Gelugpa on our first night in class. Cameron smiles a big smile. "The dharma sustains itself," he explains. "My teacher does not want anything. If you give him anything, he will give it back to you, like all traditional teachers. But when you meet with a real teacher like him, after a while, you will feel like you want to give him everything—your check book, your money. But he does not want anything," Cameron stresses. "So, the Dharma just sustains itself," he says mysteriously with a smile and does not elaborate further.[19] The means of financially sustaining the adoption of foreign cultural traditions is mystified. It is as if Buddhist religious/spiritual traditions have a magical way of sustaining themselves.

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Holding up strings of black, brown and maroon-beads, Paul makes a pitch for the necklaces that he made. He introduces one of the darker beads first. There are 108 beads in each one, he says. This one goes for $10. The sandalwood one is more expensive because of the wood. It is $30. "The cost is really just to cover the cost of the materials. Whatever profit I get goes into that," Paul points to the glass donation pot under the Buddha statue. Paul stresses that he is not making a lot off of these necklaces. "In fact, the sandalwood type of necklace can go up to $100 in some places outside. This is a

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[19] Source: Arizona Gelugpa (fieldnotes) First Class, p.4

really bargain," Paul appeals to the newbies in the meditation hall. He passes the beads around the room. People hold them quickly, without looking too closely.[20]

I stop Paul as he is leaving the meditation room. I ask him if he makes smaller mala necklaces. "You mean, like that?" He points to the bracelet that the teacher is wearing. "Yeah, I am looking for gifts." I tell him that I have a limited budget. We walk out of the meditation room and exchange phone numbers at the kitchen so he can get in touch and send me some pictures after he has ideas. I ask him if this is his full time job. He tells me that he is tired for working for other people. His wife's vintage clothes business is doing pretty well so he is starting his own thing now, beginning with mala beads and vegan soaps. He reiterates that his plan is to put whatever money he is making from the mala beads into "places like this" he again points into the room, towards the shrine. It seems really important to him that he is not making money from Buddhism.[21]

When religion/spirituality intersects with material need, white-Caucasian American spiritual followers become very concerned about keeping with the "traditional way" of doing things. However, as seen in *heterophily as simulacra*, the traditional way of doing things is not an important factor for US-American spiritual followers' decision on how and what they want to adopt from a foreign culture. What is happening here?

The fact that one gains social and cultural capital as a result of one's engagement with another culture in the domain of religion/spirituality is not something that spiritual followers want to admit. The ideology that capital gain is sacrilegious creates barriers for a clear understanding of the reasons for engaging in intercultural exchange in the domain

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[20] Source: Arizona Thereavada (fieldnotes) June 13, p.4
[21] Source: Arizona Thereavada (fieldnotes) June 13, p. 6

of religion/spirituality. Discourse on respect for another culture's norms is used to hide the discomfort with one's agenda of capitalizing on cultural heterophily.

Narrating Utopia

"*Desiring a Better Future*"

Figure 3.7. Properties of Narrating Utopia

    Property (a) Correcting Undesirable Characteristics

    Property (b) Getting to a Better Place

    Property (c) Unleashing Our Superpower

The intercultural communication puzzle gradually unfolds and untangles with each moment of persistently asking: "What is happening here." The white-Caucasian American adoption of Buddhist religious/spiritual traditions is not really about having an interest in another culture. They adopt the artifacts, rituals and signs that they want. But when more effort than they are willing to invest into another culture is asked of them, they retreat into "doing whatever we want". The adoption of (an)Other culture's tradition was never about continuation of that tradition or reverence of the tradition.

Ironically, when it comes to justifying actions that they are not comfortable with owning (such as making money in Buddhism) they employ the discourse that they are revering another culture's tradition, thereby hiding their capitalist and materialist agenda for engaging with intercultural exchange. In doing so, white-Caucasian American spiritual followers reveal that they are not primarily concerned about revering another cultures' traditions and things when they engage with cultural heterophily. Rather, they are primarily taking a self-centric approach to intercultural relations with the Other.

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Intercultural interactions are undertaken because the Self wants something. The question that now begs asking then is -- What is it that white-Caucasian American spiritual followers want when they engage with the Buddhist religious/spiritual traditions of Asia?

<div align="center">*   *   *</div>

It was once again beginner's meditation night at Arizona Theravada. Leonard the regular teacher was away and Lester was our stand-in teacher. The class had just done walking meditation and we were ready to sit again. Lester asks if "anyone would like to say anything." There is a pause and so I jump in with my prepared question. I said, well, to follow up with our conversation earlier about why we meditate, I was wondering if you would share why you choose to meditate, if it is not too personal. "Well, it is very personal… but I don't mind sharing," Lester began.[22]

He tells us that he was a religious person from young. He was raised Roman Catholic. When he was a young man, he went into Christian seminary. "I was training to be a monk, a Father, I don't know." As he was on his way to becoming a professional Christian, it dawned on him that "I didn't love people." And that upset him.

"I'm supposed to serve but I really don't love people. I don't care about them," his voice strained. He thought there was something wrong with him but he did not know what it was. This was also the time when he realized that he was depressed. He said he had two types of depression. There was a general underlying down-ness. Then there were the deep depressions that cycle through. He knew he had depression but he didn't want to take medication for it. He wondered if the depressed Lester was him. If it was, then he wanted to feel all of himself and not numb it with drugs. But he needed a way to cope

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[22] Source: Arizona Thereavada (fieldnotes) Aug 29, p. 3 – 4

with the depression. And the Christian seminary was great but it was doing nothing for his life. He didn't see anything improve with his life by being in seminary.

Then one day, a friend told him that a Buddhist teacher was visiting from California. He went with a few friends. He was so taken by the teachings that night that he went back to the seminary and ended his studies within three months. He followed the teacher ever since. "What meditation has done for me, he concludes his story, "is to see that my depression is not me. My thoughts are like clouds in the sky. The thing with meditation is that you begin to see your thoughts. Observe them as if they were clouds."

"Then after a while, you will begin to understand, see and then to fully know that these clouds are not me. And the Buddha shows that it's possible to not just see that the clouds are not us, but that we can in fact create climate change."

"You realize that you have this superpower inside you that you can tap on. You just weren't aware of it before. Like my mother says, meditation allows you 'to can' which is her way of saying, to be able to."

 "After meditation, I realized that it wasn't that I didn't love people. I like people very much! I began to do things that I wouldn't initially do, like strike conversations and want to find out more about people. Talk to strangers. I really opened up. I also never needed to take any depression medication and depression has not bothered me since," Lester beamed.

"Buddhist meditation is a way of slowing down, to the reverse of what society is doing to us. Based on evolution, our bodies have grown for thousands of years. We have never had things blinking at us and squealing at us so constantly as now. The world is mad!" Lester exclaims. "Meditation is a way to practice what people used to know how

to do in the past naturally. Now we have forgotten how to do one thing at a time and how to focus and how to be present and how to slow down. Meditation is just being mindful and present."[23]

<center>*   *   *</center>

Narration of utopia is the linchpin to finally unlocking the intercultural puzzle. Why open oneself up to another culture if one is not really interested in another culture? Why adopt the forms of another culture if one is not intending to fully take on all aspects of that culture? Why are American spiritual followers interested in adopting Asian Buddhist religious/spiritual traditions?

Through their engagement with Buddhist religion/spirituality, white-Caucasian American spiritual followers narrate their path to a better future. They narrate a present state that has immense potential for improvement (there is a superpower inside us!). American spiritual followers appropriate foreign cultural forms, adopt foreign language and rituals, and perform Buddhist religious/spiritual identities because they want to be better than who they are now. They are communicatively creating an imaginary space where they are not restricted to the faults and potentialities of their present moment.

<center>**The Paracultural Imaginary**</center>

In taking an intercultural and communicative lens to study the diffusion of religious/spiritual traditions between cultures, the white-Caucasian American adoption of Buddhist religious/spiritual traditions reveals itself as more than just another story about the appropriation of a subordinate culture's traditions by members of a dominant cultural

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[23] Source: Arizona Thereavada (fieldnotes) Aug 1, p.3

group. This is more than a story about a dominant cultural group gaining unwarranted material advantage in the process of taking from a subordinate cultural group.

The white-Caucasian American adoption of Buddhist religious/spiritual traditions is also a story about a cultural group taking bits and pieces from other cultures to imagine a better place for themselves. This is also a story about how homophilous communities create a *paracultural imaginary* – a space where individuals can imagine themselves in the process of becoming their "Higher Selves." The diffusion of cultural traditions in the particular domain of religion/spirituality is about the creation of a cultural form that parallels currently existing cultural forms through appropriating, performing and re-signifying the behavioral conventions that are historically sedimented in another culture.

The paracultural imaginary is the self-centric postmodern project of intercultural performativity and imagination. It is the domain of colonialist appropriation and mimicry where the forms of subordinate cultural groups are simulated for imagination of the Self. The paracultural imaginary exists concurrently yet as a separate universe from existing national/ethnic groups. Like two straight lines running parallel to each other, the paracultural imaginary and existing national/ethnic groups are hard to tell apart; they feel so similar, yet, they are clearly two independent entities running alongside each other.

The paracultural imaginary is not a thing; it is not a group; and it is not a person. The paracultural imaginary is not a state; it is not a trait; it is not an attitude. The paracultural imaginary is a utopia constituted by and constitutive of intercultural exchange between groups that are imbalanced in their power relationship with each other.

The paracultural imaginary is that which can be seen through peripheral vision. It gleams in settings where members of dominant cultural groups appropriate the forms of

subordinate cultural groups in order to creatively suture together an image of who they would be if they could be better than who they are right now. The paracultural imaginary peeks out in American Buddhist study groups where white-Caucasian spiritual followers gather together for self-study without intention or opportunity of meeting the founding Asian Buddhist teacher and/or members of overseas sister-groups. The paracultural imaginary flickers in Native American *pow-wows* that cater primarily to white-Caucasian practitioners who take on Native American identities during these events. The paracultural imaginary is that which sparkles and shimmers between the lines when homophilous communities take on the cultural traditions of the Other so as to imagine who they would be if they could be better than what they are now. The paracultural imaginary is that which lies just below the surface of communication behaviors in homophilous communities that are practicing the cultural traditions of the Other. Taking a critical intercultural communication lens to view the interactional dynamics of such homophilous communities affords the revelation of the paracultural imaginary in the diffusion of religious/spiritual traditions.

US-American spiritual followers who say that they are creating a Western or American Buddhism instead of adopting an Asian Buddhism are not making a facetious remark. They are being accurate in explaining what they do. They are speaking of the paracultural imaginary that is shimmering in the intercultural relations between dominant and subordinate cultural groups in the diffusion of religious/spiritual traditions between cultures. What they lacked was the vocabulary to articulate this experience of religion.

The paracultural imaginary is about cultural appropriation; yet current theorizations of cultural appropriation do not capture the whole story of the white-

Caucasian American adoption of Buddhist religious/spiritual traditions from Asian cultures. The paracultural imaginary is about cultural heterophily; yet it is also about cultural homophily. The paracultural imaginary is the *inter*-cultural story of diffusion of religious/ spiritual traditions between cultural groups; yet it is also an *intra*-cultural story about one cultural group and its way of relating to other cultural groups. The paracultural imaginary thus invites an openness to interculturality, the willingness to consider "how culture involves contested sites of identification as opposed to others and the resulting political consequences" (Halualani, Mendoza, & Drzewiecka, 2009, p. 17).

* * *

When I began this dissertation project, I thought this was a story about two interdependent entities -- "us" -- in spirituality together. I looked into the mirror of intercultural relations and I only saw you and you and you. I looked hard for my presence and the integration of my voice. But in the minds of those towards whom I have chosen to subordinate myself, there was always only you and your needs and your wants. I thought I was giving face in keeping silent. Many months later, today, I speak through writing what I did not speak out loud about then with my voice.

* * *

Thus I have seen.

Chapter 4

ANALYSIS

At the start of this dissertation project, I perceived US-Americans' adoption of the religious/spiritual traditions of Asian cultures as indicative of their cultural openness and curiosity towards foreign cultures. It seemed an impressive feat that a group of individuals would be open to embracing another culture so much so that they end up adopting another culture's religious/spiritual traditions. Having felt welcomed at Buddhist centers here, I idealized US-American Buddhist religious/spiritual sites as intercultural hotbeds where people of the United States opened themselves to people from other cultures for the common goal of forming religious/spiritual community.

Based on de la Garza (1997) and Roberts' (2003) studies on the white-Caucasian American adoption of Native American spiritualities, I identified cultural identity as a key sensitizing concept for data collection at the start of this project. Influenced by the zeitgeist of enthusiasm for Buddhism in US-America at the time that I was beginning the project, I included place and material culture as sensitizing concepts with which to begin this research study. However, during data analysis, as I critically interrogated what was (not) done, what was (not) said and who was (not) present in the scenes that I was in, I found myself in the silent spaces that spoke to power and prejudice in the embodied dynamics of intercultural interaction in the diffusion of religious/spiritual traditions.

Which bodies are present in the adoption of Buddhist religious/spiritual traditions by US-Americans? What voices are privileged when US-Americans learn about the Buddhist religious/spiritual traditions of Asia? What attitudes towards cultural relations lie beneath the surface of the smiling, compassionate faces of US-American spiritual

followers who are practicing Buddhist religious/spiritual traditions? In the following sections, I articulate each property of the categories that emerged during data analysis as well as relate these categories and their properties to current literature on intercultural communication.

Heterophily as Cosplay

The degree to which the individuals in a communication interaction are dissimilar from each other is known as heterophily (Rogers, 1995). Cultural heterophily is the first and strongest impression that hit me when stepping into a Buddhist class in the United States. The Buddhist classes that I observed were infused with artifacts and behaviors borrowed from different Asian cultures. Cultural heterophily expressed itself in material culture, sounds, movements and Buddhist participants' dress.

Property (1a) Looks like Buddhism

Looks like Buddhism refers to the use of Asian objects and religious-wares to decorate the place where one is conducting Buddhist activity. For example, as described at the beginning of Chapter Three, the Buddhists at Arizona Zen decorated their temple yard with stone Buddha statues and Chinese paper lanterns. At Arizona Theravada, spiritual followers placed a large Buddha statue and a smaller statue of *Kwan Yin*, the goddess of compassion, in the meditation hall. At Arizona Gelupa, the Buddhists decorated their room with rugs and stools with flower embroidery that looked like those I had seen in stores that imported goods from China, Vietnam and Japan.

Once, a student asked the monk at Arizona Theravada why there was a statue of the Buddha in the mediation hall. The Sri Lankan monk said: "Without the Buddha statue, this is just an empty room. You don't know you are at a Buddhist place. I know it

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is a meditation room but you don't know. Now we put this Buddha statue, you will know you are at a Buddhist place."[24] In short, the places where American Buddhists practiced their religion/spirituality were marked with statues of the Buddha as well as items with patterns and prints from Asia so that they would "look Buddhist."

Property (1b) Dressing like a Buddhist

In US-American Buddhism, not only does the place where one conducts Buddhism have to look Buddhist; the persons participating in Buddhist events desire to "look Buddhist" as well. *Dressing like a Buddhist* refers to the attention paid to dressing right when attending Buddhist activities. This property ranges from coordinating the color of one's clothing to the color theme in the group, to wearing a "full costume" of meditation robes when doing Buddhism.

As described in Chapter Three, committed members of Arizona Zen dressed in black Japanese meditation robes when doing Buddhism. Newer members who did not yet own the robes were dressed in sweat pants and t-shirts that were black like the robes. Other examples of *dressing like a Buddhist* in Buddhist communities include wearing accessories with the Sanskrit word "*Om*," using cotton shawls that had small prints like the Pashmina shawls that were sold in Indian stores as well as using mala beads to ornament one's wrist or neck. When doing Buddhism, one had to look the part by dressing like a Buddhist.

Property (1c) Sounds like Buddhism

Close recording of what US-American participants were doing at Buddhist events demonstrated that not only does one have to look Buddhist when doing Buddhism, one

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[24] Fieldnotes AZ Theravada Aug 1

also had to sound Buddhist. *Sounds like Buddhism* refers to the types of sounds that one would make or adopt when in a place that was specially set aside for Buddhist activity. Across all the Buddhist groups that conducted rituals, there was invariably the use of meditation bell or meditation bowl or wooden clappers to signal the beginning and/or the end of a ritual. It seemed very important to the participants of Buddhist events that their event employed the use of the "right" Buddhist sound for the various activities that they wanted to do.

For example, at the beginning of walking meditation one night at Arizona Theravada, the meditation teacher lamented that he did not have the wooden clappers that were commonly used to signal the end of the meditation session. I understood what he meant immediately. At other meditation groups that I attended, meditation leaders would often hit two wooden sticks sharply together to indicate the end of walking meditation.

The meditation teacher at Arizona Theravada described the sound of the wooden clappers for a while. He then told the group that since they did not have the clappers, what he would do is to hit his meditation bowl twice at the end of walking meditation. He instructed the participants to pretend that the sound of him hitting his meditation bowl was the sound of wooden clappers hitting together[25]. This example epitomizes how important sounding like a Buddhist was to American spiritual followers who were participating in Buddhist religion/spirituality.

Property (1d) Moving like a Buddhist

In addition to looking and sounding like a Buddhist, one also has to move like a Buddhist when participating in Buddhist religion/spirituality in the United States. *Moving*

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[25] Fieldnotes AZ Theravada Aug 1

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like a Buddhist refers to adopting particular hand gestures and body postures when participating in Buddhist meditations. As described in Chapter Three, the Buddhist classes that I attended were focused on teaching newcomers how to hold their bodies during meditation, where to place their hands, where to place their shoes, what to chant and when to speak/ not speak when doing Buddhism. American spiritual followers paid attention to holding their bodies in appropriate ways when doing Buddhism. The above-described observations (a) looks like Buddhism, (b) dressing like a Buddhist, (c) sounds like Buddhism, and (d) moving like a Buddhist, characterize *heterophily as cosplay* -- the different ways that cultural heterophily is played with in the paracultural imaginary.

Power and Play in Intercultural Communication

Play in the paracultural imaginary is most akin to the form of play known as *cosplay*. Cosplay is a type of dress-up activity popular amongst fans of Japanese manga and anime (for elaboration, see e.g., Perper & Cornog, 2011). Short for "costume play", cosplay is a worldwide performance-based movement where fans perform the narratives of their favorite manga or anime shows.

Cosplay fans set aside time from their everyday life to dress up as characters from their favorite manga books or anime shows. Dropping the behaviors, dress and forms of their daily existence, cosplay fans escape into a separate dimension when they perform their favorite manga and anime characters. Using the scripts and narratives from their favorite books and shows, cosplay participants place "extreme concentration on costume form and fabric" to create imaginary identities that supplant their "real identities" in everyday life (Perper & Cornog, 2011, p. 77).

In a similar fashion, US-American spiritual followers place a lot of emphasis on the costume form, location décor and body performance when they are "doing Buddhism". Unlike cosplay, however, spiritual followers are not performing the identities of their favorite Buddhist monks / nuns at Buddhist centers. Nor are they play-acting the narrative scripts from Buddhist myths and fables in their Buddhist classes. When doing Buddhism, American spiritual followers are performing themselves as "the Buddhist" by using artifacts, costumes, gestures, movements, sounds and décor borrowed from Asian / non-European cultures. In this sense, the four observations -- (a) looks like Buddhism, (b) dressing like a Buddhist, (c) sounds like Buddhism, and (d) moving like a Buddhist -- come together to constitute the larger phenomenon of *heterophily as cosplay* when American people engage in the Buddhist religious/spiritual traditions. *Heterophily as cosplay* captures the serious play that individuals engage in when they perform their selves as cultural beings.

Bial (2004) says that to play is "to escape, to step out of everyday existence, if only for a moment, and to observe a different set of rules. We play to explore, to learn about ourselves and the world around us." (p. 135) In trying to look, sound, dress and move "like Buddhism", US-American spiritual followers play with cultural difference via artifacts, movement, dress, and sound that are markedly different from that which they are used to in their upbringing and/or current life. Playing with cultural difference allows these individuals to step out of the norms of behavior in their everyday existence. Play engages cultural difference with imagination. The paracultural imaginary is born from playing with cultural heterophily.

However, playing with cultural heterophily is not innocent, naïve and without consequence. Who is allowed to play with another culture's traditions? Which sacred cultural traditions are taken upon in the spirit of play? Which sacred cultural traditions are considered out of bounds for play? Critically interrogating the nature of play in intercultural interactions -- who is playing with heterophily and whose culture is being played with -- reveals the fundamental differences in power status between cultural groups in intercultural exchange. It is a privileged position to be able to play with another culture's forms will little concern for negative kickback. Cultures whose forms are taken in the spirit of play without any say in whether or not they would like their cultural forms to be treated as play are those considered subordinate by cultural Others. Asymmetric power relations permeate intercultural exchange between groups.

In his articulation of an Afrocentric ideology for intercultural scholarship, Asante (2008) says: "Sharing of images is reasonable, valuable and positive; image domination, however, is the same as other colonial conquests, vile, repressive and negative." I follow Asante to argue that the sharing of one's traditions with members of other cultural groups is reasonable, valuable and positive. However, the type of cultural sharing where the dominant cultural group gets to play with a subordinate group's traditions in order to improve their self-image and self is vile, repressive and negative, particularly for members of subordinate cultural groups who witness the scene.

Heterophily as cosplay is the colonial conquest that takes place when members of dominant cultural groups play with heterophily. It is the subtle dynamics of intercultural interaction that makes members of subordinate cultural groups who are intercultural witnesses to the paracultural imaginary uncomfortable yet unsure why they are

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uncomfortable. *Heterophily as cosplay* is the reason members of subordinate cultural groups wonder if they are being sensitive when they feel something is amiss about the paracultural imaginaries that draw from the traditions and forms of their heritage.

Heterophily as Simulacra

When individuals form groups to fulfill particular needs, their social activity becomes *institutionalized* (Birenbaum & Sagari, 1976). The institutionalization of any social activity comes with "a set of social expectations that clearly state which activities are to be performed by whom, the rewards of fulfilling these expectations and the costs of not fulfilling them" (p. 3). The expected patterns of appropriate ways of communicating when in a group is known as "norms" (Collier, 1997).

As described in *Heterophily as Cosplay*, the behavioral norms at American Buddhist groups are appropriated from Asian Buddhist religious/spiritual traditions. How do behaviors appropriated from various foreign cultures develop into behavioral norms in the paracultural imaginary? *Heterophily as simulacra* describes the process by which cultural behaviors that were appropriated from cultural Others become adopted as norms in the paracultural imaginary.

Property (2a) He Knows More Than I Do

Persons in homophilous communities who are deemed to be more experienced with Asian Buddhist traditions are looked upon to model appropriate behavioral norms in the Buddhist space. If a senior student or Buddhist teacher does a ritual that newcomers to Buddhism do not entirely agree with or know much about, the newcomers are likely to still follow suit because the teacher is supposed to know what he is doing.

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For example, one evening, at the end of Beginner's Buddhism class at Arizona Gelupa, Cameron the teacher begins to do full prostrations at the front of the rug, facing the shrine on top of the fireplace[26]. He begins with prayer hands above the head, then at the chest, and then he goes down on his knees and places his forehead on the floor. Kevin, one of the more senior students in the group, does the prostrations together with Cameron. All the other beginner Buddhism students are standing still behind them, watching them do the prostrations. I stand still as well, wondering what I should do.

After Kevin and Cameron finish with their prostrations, everyone else in the room begin to copy what they just saw. I follow suit but I am self-conscious because I do not know if I am doing it right. Members of homophilous communities adopt a particular behavior because the teacher or senior student in the group is doing it. *He knows more than I do* therefore refers to how knowledge of the foreign becomes cultural capital to determine which specific behavioral norms will become the paracultural imaginary.

Property (2b) Lets' See What Happens

One of the defining characteristics of a group norm is that behavioral violations are punished (Birenbaum & Sagari, 1976). *Lets' see what happens* refers to the withholding of judgment or punishment when there is a transgression of behavioral norms in the group, for example, as described in previous chapter, waiting to see what happens when someone does not take off their shoes when entering the meditation hall.

Buddhist converts wait to see what happens when a norm is transgressed rather than punish the violator of the norm. This reveals an underlying uncertainty either about the "rightness" of a behavioral norm (i.e., do they actually do this in Asia) and/or the

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[26] Fieldnotes AZ Gelupa S2C2 p. 14

"rightness" of one's adoption of the behavior as the norm (i.e., do we really want to do this). *Lets' see what happens* thus highlights the emotional uncertainty that results from the fact that everyone is merely following the follower in the paracultural imaginary.

When everyone in the room is an adopter of a foreign culture, it is difficult to tell whether a particular behavior that is done in a Buddhist setting is different because it is done in that foreign culture or whether it is idiosyncratic to the person performing the behavior. When behaviors are appropriated from other cultures and performed in homophilous communities, what results then is simulacra. Baudrillard (1983) uses the term simulacra to describe how a society simulates itself to the point where we do not get the "real" anymore; we only get simulation: "To dissimulate is to feign not to have what one has. To simulate is to feign to have what one hasn't. One implies a presence, the other an absence." (p. 5)

When the behavioral conventions historically sedimented in the culture of the Other are appropriated and performatively cited in homophilous communities, cultural heterophily exists as simulacra -- copies of copies of copies of the repertoire of behaviors associated with "being Buddhist" that are performatively cited by senior members in the homophilous communities.

Roberts (2003) uses the term "pseudo" to encapsulate the simulacrum of cultural heterophily in the white-Caucasian Americans' appropriation of Native American cultural identity and *pow-wows*. She calls emotivism a "pseudonarrative", the white-Caucasian appropriation of Native American *pow-wows* the creation of "pseudocultural events" and the appropriated cultural identities as "pseudocultural identities."

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According to Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, the preffix *pseudo*

denotes that something is a sham, false or a substitute of the genuine, authentic and

original. Roberts (2003) uses the term "pseudo" as "a metaphor for purely fictional

expressions that often result when individual choice (emotivism) dominates the use of

cultural signs" (p. 205). In contrast, I employ the prefix *para* to complicate the

relationship between the appropriated and original cultural forms as two closely related

but independent entities that are growing alongside each other, aside from each other,

beyond each other. *Heterophily as simulacra* is about creating copies of the traditions of

other cultural groups such that one exists parallel to but independent from the groups that

one has appropriated from. The focus of the paracultural imaginary is on the relationship

between the parallel cultural groups instead of focusing on which group is the originator

of the tradition in question. By focusing on the relationship between cultural groups, I

privilege the dynamics of communication in the study of intercultural exchange.

Property (2c) I Have Never Seen It Before

Identity is constituted through performativity (Butler, 1990). The Buddhist "I" is

discursively established in homophilous communities of American spiritual followers

through the performative citation of behaviors that are appropriated from Asian Buddhist

religious/spiritual traditions. One of the key challenges of performing the American

Buddhist identity for beginner Buddhists is the limited repertoire of behaviors that are

available for the performance of identity.

Beginner Buddhists interpret behaviors they have never seen before as a norm in

Buddhism. For example, Lorenzo describes how he determines if someone he has never

met is a Buddhist or not: "There are new people every week. It's the summer so it's very

small. We've had 30 odd people in there. And some of them obviously are, or my mind, it is obvious to me that they are practicing Buddhists. They do things that I don't yet understand. They do something with the chanting or the prayer (shows prayer hands)." *I have never seen it before* thus refers to the importance of novelty for determining which elements of Other cultures are considered norms by beginner Buddhists. Behaviors that are novel are deduced as coming from heterophilous origins and are therefore copied.

Property (2d) Do Whatever You Want

Do whatever you want refers to the self-centric approach to intercultural relations in the adoption of behavioral norms from foreign cultures. Peer- teachers sometimes explicitly tell newcomers what they should or should not do when at the temple / Buddhist Center. At other times, however, the peer-teachers tell newcomers that they do not have to do something if they do not believe in it or they can choose to use another word if the Buddhist term does not agree with them. Essentially, the underlying message to newcomers is that they can do whatever they want; just try it out.

In *Painting the White Face Read*, de la Garza (writing as González, 1997) posited that the emphasis on postmodern identities has enabled white-Caucasian American spiritual followers to "believe identity is something that can simply be chosen, as from a menu." (p. 485). *Do whatever you want* is seen in de la Garza's ethnographic poetry such as Starfeather woman (p. 490) who does whatever s/he wants with Native American religious/spiritual traditions. *Do whatever you want* is a privilege of whiteness because "whiteness enables ethnic invisibility and choice as white immigrants and ethnics are not marked in the U.S. cultural politics as Other" (Mendoza et al., 2002). The role of the self-centric privilege of whiteness in the adoption of religious/spiritual traditions is also

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highlighted by Roberts (2003) who argues that "in postmodernity, non-Natives do not 'play Indian' to disguise their White identity but to claim a new personal one; 'White' is re-cast as no identity at all." To sum up the above, *heterophily as simulacra* is thus characterized by the self-centric *do whatever we want* privilege of whiteness, the performative citation of behaviors that one has never seen before and/or behaviors belong to the repertoire of senior students (i.e., *he knows more than I do*) and the emotional uncertainty of *lets' see what happens*.

<center>**Passive Heterophilous Communication**</center>

Despite the display of *heterophily as cosplay* and *heterophily as simulacra*, my idealization of American Buddhism as a hotbed of intercultural activity began to be disrupted when I paid attention to who was participating in the Buddhist classes and events where I conducted participant observation. There was a mix of ethnicities and nationalities at the Buddhist events / seminars conducted at Texas Theravada, Phoenix Kagyu and Arizona Kagyu. However, the Buddhist classes at Arizona Theravada, Arizona Gelugpa, and Arizona Zen attracted a fairly culturally homogeneous crowd.

Based on my conversations with the students at these Buddhist classes as well as from the conversations that I overheard, American spiritual followers who attended the Buddhist classes were quite well-educated and holding white-collar or professional jobs. Based on subjective observations of physical appearance (e.g., hair, skin), many of the attendees at the Buddhist groups where I conducted participant observation were of middle to senior age and appeared to be of white-Caucasian descent. More telling than demographics of the student population, however, was the interaction dynamics through

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which the American spiritual followers at these sites preferred to interact with Buddhist religious/spiritual traditions.

Property (3a) Engaging with Texts on Foreign Culture

Between learning about an Asian cultural tradition via interaction with Asian people versus learning about the Asian cultural tradition through texts, my interviewees preferred to begin with the latter. A recent participant of Buddhist classes, Lorenzo brought his favorite Buddhist books, filled with underlining and highlighting, to show me his process of learning about Buddhism. In addition, Lorenzo also brought a binder full of printed notes on Buddhism from the Internet to his interview, indicative of how cultural transfer takes place without interaction with foreign persons.

Sandra, a Buddhist practitioner for more than ten years, recounts how she learned about Buddhism when the person who sparked her interest left the country: "At that point, well…we had talked about taking refuge and I was like, yeah well, ok… How do I do that? So I wrote down books, and I wrote down all these things and I decided ok, I will get these books and then I will go to Nepal and I will find the highest lamas and I will take refuge that way. And…so I decided well I'd just get books by the Dalai Lama because, of course, that would be the very best thing to do. And I got the books by the Dalai Lama."

In the minds of American spiritual followers like Lorenzo and Sandra, engaging with texts instead of people is naturalized as "the best thing to do" when one wants to learn about a foreign culture. Lorenzo and Sandra's experience is echoed in the history of American engagement with foreign cultures. Engagement with texts instead of people is a key aspect of learning about Asian religious/spiritual traditions in America. In his record

of the history of Buddhism in America, Fields (1981) notes that Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson, both who are famous for blending Asian religious/spiritual philosophy into their writing, "had never met a practicing Hindu or Buddhist. The Concordians stayed home." (p. 55).

Americans such as Thomas Jefferson who later became interested in Buddhism and Hinduism drew their knowledge mainly from books published by these fellow US-Americans. American spiritual followers are able to do away with the need to interact with cultural others when learning about the religious/spiritual traditions of a foreign culture by relying on books about that foreign culture. The phenomenon of engaging with texts instead of people to learn about a foreign culture therefore has a long tradition in the transfer of cultural traditions within the domain of religion/spirituality.

Property (3b) Consulting Within the Community

Even if they were to interact with people, American spiritual followers grouped together with those of similar cultural background to learn Buddhist religion/spirituality. Many of my interviewees had a similar trajectory of entering into Buddhism. After some time of reading Buddhism on their own, my interviewees wanted to look for other people from within their community to study Buddhism together.

Unlike reading Buddhist books alone, learning Buddhism with others provides the benefit of a more systematic form of intercultural self-study. For example, at Lorenzo's Buddhist group, the Buddhist teacher taught an eight-week course to beginning Buddhists. Every week, the class reads one chapter from a book provided by the teacher. The teacher emails two to three questions about the book chapter as homework

assignment. Students discuss the assigned reading and email assignments when they meet for class.

The primary Buddhist teacher at four of my six fieldwork sites is a White-Caucasian American man and the participants of these Buddhist groups are primarily also White-Caucasian American. How do individuals understand an explanation of life and its complexities when this explanation comes from a completely different cultural paradigm that includes concepts (e.g., reincarnation, *lungta*) and deities (e.g., *Kwan Yin*) that one does not know about? How is learning about a foreign religious/spiritual tradition possible without intercultural interaction?[27]

Engaging with texts on foreign culture (property 3a) thus relates to *consulting within the community* (property 3b) in two ways. First, spiritual followers who join Buddhist groups to learn about Buddhist religion/spirituality or to practice Buddhist religion/spirituality usually also have the habit of reading Buddhist books by themselves. Second, spiritual followers who meet with others to learn about Buddhism are also engaging with texts about foreign culture, albeit in a group setting.

As mentioned earlier, Buddhist classes and events tend to be a mix of those with a high level of cultural diversity (e.g., those at Texas Theravada, Phoenix Kagyu and Arizona Kagyu) vs. those with little to no cultural diversity in terms of ethnic and nationality of the participants (e.g., Arizona Zen, Arizona Theravada, Arizona Gelupa). How do individuals understand an explanation of life and its complexities when this explanation comes from a completely different cultural paradigm that includes concepts

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[27] Source: Arizona Gelugpa, First Class, p. 4

(e.g., reincarnation) and deities that one does not know about? How is learning about a foreign religious/spiritual tradition possible without intercultural interaction?

Property (3c) Foreign Culture Makes Sense

Interviewees explain that the concepts and frameworks in Buddhism "just make sense" to them when they read the text, even if there was no one to explain the text to them. Susan recounts her experience reading her first book on Asian spiritual philosophy:

> "I started to read it and something clicked. I was about 28, 29 years old and something clicked and I realized that that there was reincarnation. It just made sense to me. All of a sudden it was like there was this cloud in my brain and it lifted. That was like the huge awakening." (interview transcript, p. 3)

Another interviewee, Lorenzo, expressed experiencing a similar moment of Buddhism "making sense" during self-study: "I have difficult time learning because I don't retain things well so I have to go over and over and over and over. You know, and then I get them. I mean they make sense. It's not that I'm convincing myself that this is true. It's 'oh! That makes sense to me.'" *Foreign culture makes sense* is thus a type of confidence that individuals can "make it on their own" without the help of others. It is the confident voice that says "don't worry, I've got it" when thrown the question, "Need help with that foreign text?"

Foreign culture makes sense (property 3c) is a necessary condition for properties (3a) and (3b). Regardless of whether one is reading Buddhist books alone or with others in the community, there is no need to engage with others who are culturally different if one feels or thinks that Buddhist religion/spirituality "makes sense". Further, there is no need to engage with individuals from another culture if one is able to understand

Buddhist religion/spirituality by figuring out what the difficult terms mean with the help of other community members. Cultural others are irrelevant to the process of understanding Buddhist religion/spirituality because the individuals involved in this process are confident that they have understood the Buddhist religious/spiritual traditions by themselves.

If there are no cultural others in some American Buddhist groups, does this mean that intercultural communication does not exist in these groups? After all, intercultural communication is traditionally defined as communication with others who are unalike ourselves. I argue that even though there are no people from another culture in the communication setting, one could still be involved in a very specific form of intercultural interaction that I term *passive heterophilous communication*.

Parallel to how *passive smoking* refers to taking in cigarette smoke without actually smoking a cigarette and *passive income* refers to receiving income without needing to go to work (e.g., dividend income from stocks and shares or rental income from property ownership), passive heterophilous communication refers to engaging with a foreign culture without actually needing to interact with heterophilous others.

In literature on the diffusion of innovation, the degree to which conversation partners are culturally similar is referred to as homophily (E. Rogers, 1995, p. 19). Heterophily is the opposite of homophily. Heterophily refers to the degree to which the individuals in a communication interaction are dissimilar from each other. The essential difference between homophily and heterophily is that the former refers to cultural similarity and the latter refers to cultural dissimilarity. My observation of white-Caucasian Americans learning Buddhist religious/ spiritual traditions is that the
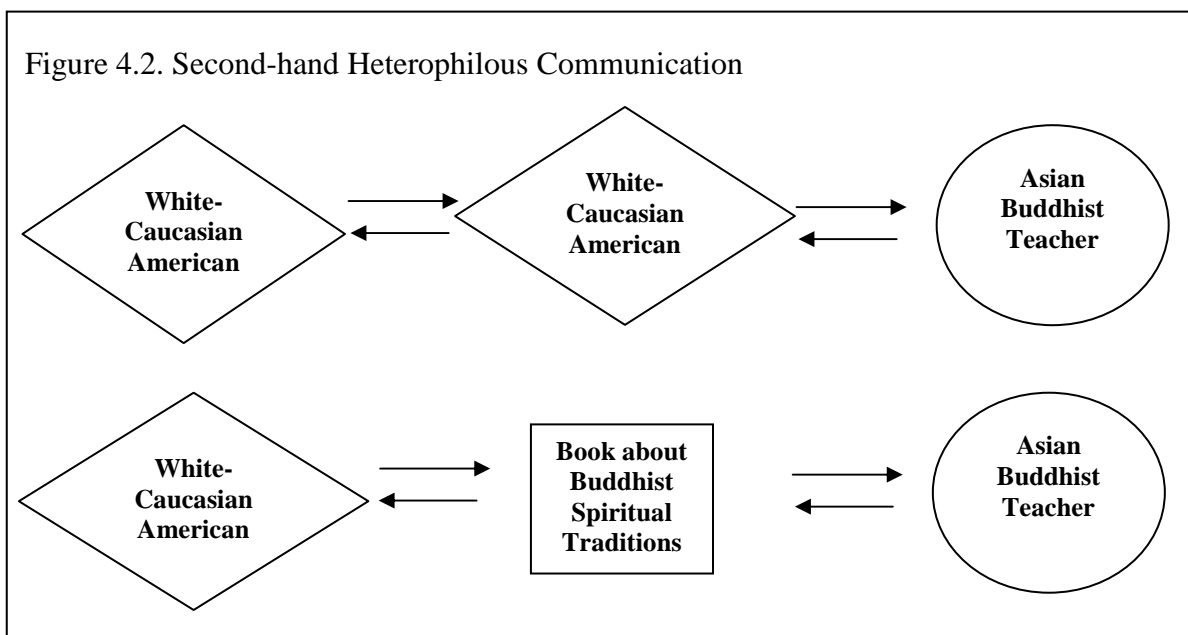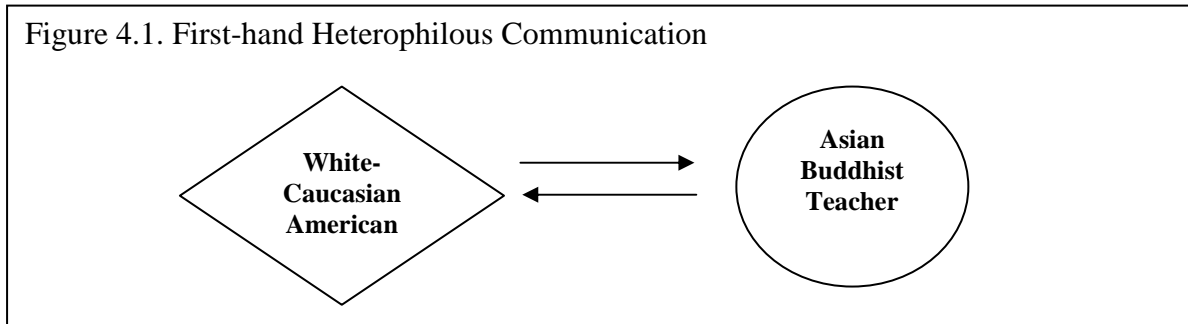
communication interaction takes place primarily between homophilous individuals. However, these homophilous individuals are interacting with another culture, albeit second-hand and not first-hand.

Second-hand intercultural communication is occurring when spiritual followers learn about Buddhism from their fellow white-Caucasian Americans who have studied Asian Buddhist religious/spiritual traditions with Asian Buddhist teachers. Second-hand intercultural communication is occurring when spiritual followers learn about Buddhism from their books about Buddhist religious/spiritual traditions.

Second-hand intercultural communication also occurs in other settings. It occurs when martial arts enthusiasts learn Chinese, Japanese or Korean martial arts from their fellow white-Caucasian Americans who have studied *kung-fu* or *karate* or *taekwondo* with Asian martial arts teachers. It occurs when would-be expatriates get together to learn about cultural adaptation from someone in their community who has been living abroad as an expatriate for many years. In short, *passive heterophilous communication* (PHC) occurs whenever members of a homophilous community engage with a foreign culture as mediated through the interpretations and explanations of another person or a text on the foreign culture.

Intercultural communication is first-hand when one interacts with a heterophilous-other. This is the traditional definition of intercultural communication, i.e., communication with others who are unalike ourselves. Intercultural communication is second-hand when one is engaging with a foreign culture through the interpretations and directions of those who are culturally similar to themselves. The difference between first-

hand and second-hand intercultural communication is visually explained in the figures
below.

Figure 4.1. First-hand Heterophilous Communication

White-Caucasian American → ← Asian Buddhist Teacher

Figure 4.2. Second-hand Heterophilous Communication

White-Caucasian American → ← White-Caucasian American → ← Asian Buddhist Teacher

White-Caucasian American → ← Book about Buddhist Spiritual Traditions → ← Asian Buddhist Teacher

Passive heterophilous communication (PHC) is the type of intercultural

communication that echoes Milton Bennett's (1986; 1993) conceptualization of

ethnocentric states of intercultural sensitivity. Ethnocentricity refers to the tendency to

think of one's culture as superior to other cultures, for example, by placing one's cultural

norms as the basis for evaluating other cultures; by considering one's own culture as the

only good and real culture and other cultures as inferior, delusional or lacking in some

other way.

In the Development Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS), Bennett et al (2004) describe three forms of ethnocentric responses to cultural others -- (phase 1) by denying the existence of other cultural forms as valid forms of existence, (phase 2) by raising defenses against other cultural forms as forms of existence that valid for respect and (phase 3) by minimizing the importance of culture in one's interaction with others, e.g., thinking about others as culturally neutral "everyone is a human being after all".

PHC observed in some American Buddhist groups is similar to ethnocentric denial (DMIS stage 1) in that the conversation takes place in homogenous groups that are in isolation of cultural others. Yet, the PHC observed in American Buddhist groups is different from DMIS stage 1 in that if foreigners (like me) walk into their group, they do not reject you; they do not reject your presence. Instead they make the rhetoric of welcoming you into their setting. This is a public event and they are keen to spread the word about Buddhism.

To sum up the above, passive heterophilous communication is the type of communication interaction that constitutes the paracultural imaginary. PHC is characterized by doing away with the need to interact with cultural others by reading books on Buddhism on their own; doing away with the need to interact with cultural others by creating discussion groups with others from within their community; and supported by the confidence that foreign culture makes sense to oneself.

Capitalizing on Heterophily

In every homophilous American Buddhist group, there is always one individual who stands out from the rest. This individual sits across from the other members of the group. He or she begins and ends the rituals done in the group. He or she is in charge of

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telling the group whether their interpretations of the foreign text were correct. This individual is the Buddhist teacher or meditation facilitator for the community.

Capitalizing on heterophily describes how cultural heterophily is used as a source of capital for the white-Caucasian Americans who know about another culture's traditions and meaning systems enough to teach it to others in their community. Backed by their relationship with and knowledge of the culturally heterophilous, individuals employ certain communicative strategies to make themselves the person in the community that others consult with when wanting to learn about a foreign culture. They make themselves the teacher.

Not everyone in the community has an equal possibility of becoming a Buddhist teacher. Furthermore, not everyone who knows Buddhist religious/spiritual traditions will be perceived as a teacher of Buddhist religion/spirituality. The properties of *capitalizing on heterophily* are: (property 4a) using knowledge of the foreign as cultural capital and (property b) using relationship with heterophilous others as social capital.

Property (4a) Using Knowledge of the Foreign as Cultural Capital

Bourdieu (1986) identifies three forms of capital: economic capital (e.g., money), cultural capital (i.e., what you know) and social capital (i.e., who you know). Capital is accumulated labor that is either materialized or embodied. Lester, a meditation teacher at Arizona Theravada, speaks to how his knowledge of Buddhism is a form of accumulated labor: "Other people my age have kids and do other fun things. I spend all my free time and excess money on going to (Buddhist) retreats….While they were doing that, I was

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doing this."[28] The effort that spiritual followers put into learning Buddhism can thus be seen as a form of capital and accumulated labor.

One of the main objectives of Buddhist study groups is to learn Buddhist concepts. Someone in the group needs to be able to tell other members the "right interpretation" of the Sanskrit, Pali or Tibetan terms used in Asian Buddhist religious/spiritual traditions. Individuals who know how to flaunt their knowledge of foreign terms and/or foreign lands establish their place amongst their peers as a legitimate Buddhist teacher. Padma of Texas Theravada is learning to be a Buddhist nun. She explains the importance of being able to use Pali terms when she is talking to others in this way: "When you are talking with someone, like for me, if he did everything in English, and couldn't say anything in Pali then I would question: are you really authentic? And I am a perfectionist too, at some point. I want to have that same credibility." (Café M, p. 17)

Knowledge of the foreign is the cultural capital that individuals convert into institutionalized states (Bourdieu, 1986) of power in a community. Individuals who are peer-teachers of Asian Buddhist religious/spiritual traditions for the community are able to communicatively flaunt their knowledge of Pali, Sanskrit, and/or Tibetan terms when speaking with others. In addition, they know how to flaunt their knowledge of Asian Buddhist countries such as Thailand and Tibet. Individuals' knowledge of foreign terms and foreign lands is thus their cultural capital for claiming expertise on Buddhist religious/spiritual tradition. Their ability to communicatively display their cultural capital makes them credible the person who can have the status as the teacher in the group

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[28] Arizona Thereavada (fieldnotes) August 29, p. 5

Property (4b) Using Relationship with Heterophilous Others as Social Capital

Another communication strategy that peer-teachers use is displaying their personal relationship with important Buddhist persons. For example, Cameron, the teacher at Arizona Gelugpa has the habit of dropping the names of "Buddhist superstars" such as the Dalai Lama and other famous Buddhist monks when he talks about the lineage that he belongs to. In addition, Cameron and the other peer-teachers at Arizona Zen as well as Arizona Theravada would tell stories during class to indicate that they have close personal relationships with their Asian Buddhist teachers or with famous Asian Buddhist monks and nuns. Individuals' personal relationship with Asian Buddhist persons thus becomes their social capital for claiming expertise in Buddhist religious/spiritual traditions vis-à-vis their peers.

This property is similar to the previous property in that they both have two components. First, individuals make themselves the teacher by having knowledge of Buddhism and having social networks with other Buddhist teachers. Second, individuals make themselves the teacher when they display their knowledge and social network to others in their community. *Capitalizing on heterophily* is therefore about leveraging on the time and effort that one has spent on doing religious/spiritual activities by converting the effort into capital and then displaying this capital to others.

Capitalizing on heterophily is a necessary condition for passive heterophilous communication. Consulting within the community requires experienced interculturalists from the community who are able to take the place of the heterophilous-other to speak about foreign cultures. Individuals are able to concern themselves with cultural heterophily and yet exclude culturally-heterophilous others from the conversation

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precisely because there is one or more members within the community who are capitalizing on their knowledge and social networks to serve as teachers.

That being said, c*apitalizing on heterophily* is a necessary but insufficient condition for passive heterophilous communication. *Capitalizing on heterophily* requires that fellow spiritual followers learn about a foreign culture by forming study groups amongst themselves. If spiritual followers are satisfied with learning about Buddhism simply by doing *engaging with texts on foreign culture*, then *capitalizing on heterophily* would not be necessary because nobody feels like they need a teacher.

In other words, *capitalizing on heterophily* is a necessary condition for *consulting within the community.* Yet, the opportunity for *capitalizing on heterophily* exists only with the presence of *consulting within the community.* Capitalizing on heterophily is therefore relevant to one specific aspect of passive heterophilous communication -- consulting within the community.

Current literature on the white-Caucasian appropriation of Native American spirituality focus on the cultural consequences of appropriation (see e.g., Churchill, 1994; Whitt, 1995) as well as the wrongful exploitation of Native American culture for financial gain (see e.g., Aldred, 2000). This research adds to previous theorizations on the material consequences of cultural appropriation. Based on participant observations and interview data, I argue that the material benefit that white-Caucasian American spiritual followers get from engagement with Asian religious/spiritual traditions is not merely that which is directly derived from the selling and re-signification of another's culture. They also gain status in their social positions within their home communities.

Further, when American spiritual followers appropriate the religious/spiritual traditions of cultural Others, their gain is in a new cultural form for themselves. The cultural forms of the cultural Other, as defined by the Other, ceases to exist over time in these homophilous communities because they are re-articulated with new significations in the dominant discourse of the homophilous communities. In the appropriation (an)other culture's traditions, American spiritual followers are creatively re-imagining Asian Buddhist signifiers to create a new American Buddhist religious/spiritual tradition.

Negation of Capitalization

Individuals who use cultural heterophily as social and cultural capital deny their use of heterophily as capitalization. They deny their engagement with capital in its most crude form -- economic capital. They deny that they are capitalizing on heterophily so much so that they will even deny that they are denying that they are making money from Buddhism. I term the multiple layers of denial "the negation of capitalization." The properties of the *negation of capitalism* are (property 5a) magical thinking (property 5b) moral rightness and (property 5c) damned by profit.

Magical thinking refers to the perception that the material needs of running a Buddhist group will somehow be magically fulfilled. An example of this type of magical thinking is talk about "leaving it to the universe" to even out the different between credit and debit. Another example is thinking that spiritual followers will magically want to donate their money to the dharma without any prompting or social pressure.

That being said, spiritual followers involved in running Buddhist centers also know that without any kind of hint or pressure, Americans will not offer to give money to the dharma. The following interview segment shows Sandra's logic on the relationship

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between religion and money. Her view is that Americans are more used to the system of

tithing used by the church. The Asian Buddhist system of *dhana* -- donating money

because you want to earn "good karma" or merit -- has yet to take root in America:

> [me] So, I go to Buddhist events. And they call the donations by different names.
>
> Sometimes they say it's a donation, sometimes it's a suggested donation,
>
> sometimes it's a price or a fee…
>
> [Sandra] It's an awkward thing
>
> [me] Yes, right. So, I was wondering, when you do events, how do you decide
>
> what to call "it"?
>
> [Sandra] Well, Lama (her teacher) is very traditional. In that he believes that
>
> teachings are free and people should donate… should have the opportunity to
>
> practice generosity. That is a very difficult subject in America which is why you
>
> see it so many different ways… which is why people come up with a fee, because
>
> Americans don't understand the concept of generosity.
>
> [me] So, by generosity, what is encompassed in that?
>
> [Sandra] Well, for example, you know, like let's say at another center, a teacher is
>
> coming and they are going to teach all weekend. Like when Bardor Rinpoche
>
> comes, they charge an amount. Well, if they didn't, it could be here, where people
>
> would just think ten dollars was good. Now, they would go someplace else and
>
> pay two, three hundred dollars for a new age speaker but they don't… because we
>
> are geared here to pay what we are told to pay. We don't understand the
>
> importance of generosity. But this is why Lama being a yogi, insists on leaving it
>
> to people's sense of generosity. Because that is the first Paramita, and that is the

first part of that paramita, is, you know… generosity of giving and giving money

is actually the lowest giving but that's the place you gotta start. That's how you

make the connection. So people have to learn how to open up to do that. And they

are not going to learn that if you tell them, ok, this is the amount.

[me] So it is almost like a teaching moment.

[Sandra] It is a teaching moment. So… but, having said that, then it gets difficult

because Lamas have expenses and for them to come, there are expenses involved

and people don't always get that.

[me] So it's like a catch-22 right?

[Sandra] It is a Catch-22 and that's why you see it called many different things,

you know. And more and more in the West, that's why there are fees. People

charge fees because people don't understand the whole concept of generosity.

[me] So, can I ask you, how you get around that?

[Sandra] What do you mean?

[me] Like, since you are organizing this Buddhism, clearly you will be organizing

events and this is a situation you would be facing…

[Sandra] You mean like here? Well, that's why the Center is here in the house

too. I'm not paying for anything. I'm not paying for that (points to shrine). And

Lama's expenses, whatever has to be covered then I cover it.

[me] So, basically self-financing until generosity happens.

[Sandra] Yeah. And, it's very easy to look at that… but I've been with Lama long

enough and I've seen enough to see that this is the right way.

[me] This is the right way?

[Sandra] This is the right way that you let people practice generosity, because it comes. You know, it just comes when it is meant to. It just comes…. But you see, that is what I mean -- in the West, it is not a concept that we grew up with. Because at churches, it's tithing, you are supposed to give ten percent, you are supposed to do this… people have issues because of that. So they don't really understand. So, it is a learning thing for people.

Moral rightness is therefore the belief that adopting the system of dhana is the right thing to do when running a Buddhist center. Moral rightness explains why spiritual followers adopt the Asian Buddhist system of dhana in America although they consciously know that there are strong odds against the possibility that dhana will pay the bills. The following interview snippet between myself and Padma from Texas Theravada shows how she is thinking about the relationship between religion and money:

[me] Sometimes I see things that say that course fees… but sometimes I see things like, oh, this is for the class, this is what the class is about and then the suggested donation is… and so I was wondering like it is taboo to call it course fees or something which is why people don't say it. Or why they are making certain choices like that.

[Padma] No. Well, the meditation centers that are for profit, that are not a temple or a monastery, they will have the course fees or they will have set fees because that is a business. And that's their livelihood. They teach the meditation and the classes or whatever and the people who do that are on a salary. But when you go to a temple or a monastery, you function on dhana. So setting a fee can complicate things, you know. But some places do. They will have little gift shops.

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And what they do with that fund, like they have little bracelets or this or that.

They may be five dollars or ten dollars or thirty dollars or whatever. Well that

money is going into that temple… …

[me] Is it like taboo to say something is for sale in the Buddhist world? Is that

why people don't say it? Like they prefer to say for donation?

[Padma] Well, some people who come may not be able to afford it and making a

donation, giving whatever they can is appreciated because you don't want to deny

anyone the gift of truth excels all other gifts. And so you want to make sure it is

available to everyone. And sometimes when there is a price tag, people hesitate. It

always works out, you know, when someone gives fifty cents, someone gives five

dollars. So it always balances, it's just uh… it's kinder. It doesn't eliminate.

The third property, *damned by profit* refers to the feeling that it is "wrong" to make

money from Buddhism. When asked about the Buddhist artifacts that they make or the

cost of running a Buddhist Center, spiritual followers are very quick to point out that they

are not making <u>any</u> profit from their effort. If they make any money at all, <u>all</u> of it is

going back to Buddhism.

Damned by profit explains why there is magical thinking and moral rightness in

spiritual followers' reaction to the relationship between Buddhism and material needs.

Spiritual followers believe and feel that it is wrong to make money from religion. They

therefore insist that they do not need to make money; the money will come if they are

doing things right. And the way to do things right is to think about merit instead of profit.

It takes money to run any social organization. A large enough space for gathering

has to be rented or bought; electric and water bills need to be paid. And when spiritual

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followers gather for meditation retreats, food has to be provided for. Who pays for the dharma? *Negation of capitalization* reveals the religious ideology in American Buddhist groups regarding how to pay for the material needs of running a Buddhist organization.

Ideology is often equated with false consciousness in critical theory (Kearney, 2004). In *The German Ideology*, Marx described ideology as a *camera obscura* that "reverses the proper rapport between the real and the illusory." Ideology is defined as falsehoods -- abstract unrealities, fantasies, pseudo-worlds of fetish images -- that alienate human consciousness by attributing the origin of value to some illusory power outside of the human. The data I have gathered speak to an ideology of obliterating all the aspects of the material consequences and needs from one's engagement with religion. It is as if religion and money are like oil and water; in the mind, they are not allowed to mix together. They must remain separate. To consider them together is sacrilegious.

Cultural Universalization

In *capitalizing on heterophily*, I pointed out that individuals who are peer-teachers of Asian Buddhist religious/spiritual traditions flaunt their knowledge of foreign terms in class. American Buddhist teachers frequently throw about Sanskrit, Pali or Tibetan terms when they are teaching. Paradoxically however, American teachers at the same time downplay the foreignness of Buddhism when teaching fellow Americans. Their interactions show a tendency of taking the cultural foreignness out of Buddhism. This came in the examples that peer-teachers used, the explanations they provided and the descriptions that they gave when asked: "What does this mean in Buddhism?" [29] The

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[29] There is interview data indicating that Asian Buddhist teachers also do cultural vanillarization when teaching Buddhism to American audiences. It is thus possible that cultural vanillarization may have more to do with what American audiences want than what American Buddhist teachers want.

properties or characteristics of cultural universalization are: (property 6a) translating into the local, (property 6b) reducing to common denominator, and (property 6c) comparing with science.

Translating into the local refers to translating a foreign concept into local experience. American Buddhist teachers often rely on analogies and metaphors familiar to Americans to explain Buddhist concepts and frameworks. Its manifestation includes using sports metaphors when explaining meditation and making parallels to the Christian religion to explain Buddhist concepts. *Reducing to common denominator* refers to assuming that there is a universal human experience that is beyond culture. Its manifestation includes expressions that frame a Buddhist concept or philosophical tenet as "common sense" or a universal human experience. *Comparing with science* refers to using the specter of science to normalize explanations of Buddhist concepts and frameworks. Its manifestation comes in using findings from neuroscience or concepts from quantum physics as validation for the "truth" in Buddhist philosophies.

Cultural heterophily is a necessary condition for the existence of these three properties to be meaningful. Cultural universalization is not merely making the cultural heterophilous look like what one is already familiar with. Cultural universalization is the complex phenomenon of throwing around foreign terms or unfamiliar expressions and then explaining these in terms of a familiar term or expression.

In other words, cultural universalization requires the foreignness of Asian culture to work. Cultural universalization takes the foreignness out of the content of Asian culture but keeps the shell of foreignness on display. Cultural universalization is thus the dual phenomenon of centering and yet off-centering heterophily in homophilous

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interpersonal communication. The nuance of the phenomenon of cultural universalization is in the innovative attempt at repackaging foreign terms often used in Buddhism, e.g., Buddha-nature, *metta* etc. into what white-Caucasian Americans already know or what white-Caucasian Americans are already familiar with.

Narrating Utopia

Thus far, I have yet to address the "why" behind PHC. All my white-Caucasian interviewees tell me that did not take up Buddhism to learn about Asia. The fact that Buddhism originated in Asia was inconsequential to their interest in Buddhism. If there is no intercultural curiosity in <u>Asian</u> religious/spiritual traditions, then why are they engaging with Buddhism? *Narrating utopia* describes the "why" for spiritual followers who engage in the PHC of Buddhist religious/spiritual traditions.

Walter Fisher claims the narrative as a paradigm for communication research (Fisher, 1984, 1985). People are *homo narrans* who describe the meaning of their lives to themselves and to others through narratives. When white-Caucasian American Buddhists tell themselves and others about Buddhist meditation, they narrate into being "a time and place that is not-yet-here" (Munoz, 2006). Utopia, as discussed by Frankfurt school thinkers such as Ernst Bloch, Thedor Adorno and Herbert Marcuse, is "a critique of the here and now, it is an insistence that there is… something missing in the here and the now." (p. 11) Utopia is about possibility; it is about hope, about what "should be." The properties of *narrating utopia* are: (property 7a) correcting undesirable characteristics, (property 7b) getting to a better place and (property 7c) unleashing our superpower.

Of the different practices and rituals in Asian Buddhist religious/spiritual traditions, interviewees focused their comments primarily on the practice of meditation.

One of the reasons that interviewees are enthusiastic about adopting Buddhism is for its benefit of calming the mind. Buddhist meditation is perceived as peaceful and relaxing. *Correcting undesirable characteristics* refers to talking about the meaning of Buddhist meditation in terms of how things "should be" or "should not be" a certain way. When spiritual followers narrate their interest in Buddhist meditation, there is an underlying critique that their life "should not be" tainted by workaholism and attachment to material possessions. Doing meditation is meaningful because interviewees hold out the hope that meditation will change these characteristics that they perceive as undesirable. In their perfect version of life, they should be calm and content.

Unleashing our superpower refers to this sense of hope underlying spiritual followers' narration of the meaning of Buddhist meditation. This sense of hope stems from the assumption that there is an untapped human potential inside of human beings that Buddhist meditation unlocks. Doing Buddhist meditation is meaningful because we have a superpower inside us that give the potential for things to be different.

Getting to a better place refers to the phenomenon of comparing the present version of life with a vision of a better version of life when narrating the meaning and benefit of Buddhist meditation. Spiritual followers often use rhetoric of comparison when discussing Buddhist meditation. For example, Lester the teacher at Arizona Theravada likes to compare the 21st century with a previous time where life was less stressful and had less technology.[30] Cameron the teacher at Arizona Gelugpa talks about comparing oneself to others who have greater spiritual attainment.[31] Lorenzo, a member of Arizona Theravada compares his current happy and open disposition to his previous self that was

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[30] Source: Arizona Thereavada (fieldnotes) Aug 1, p.3
[31] Source: Arizona Gelugpa (fieldnotes) S2C1, p.8

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tortured by post-traumatic stress disorder.[32] Underlying these comparisons is that doing meditation would get them to a better place.

Relationship Between Categories

Figure 4.3 displays the relationship between the categories described in the above sections. Circles represent categories and squares represent properties. Straight lines link properties with categories as well as category with category. The lines represent relationships between properties and categories.
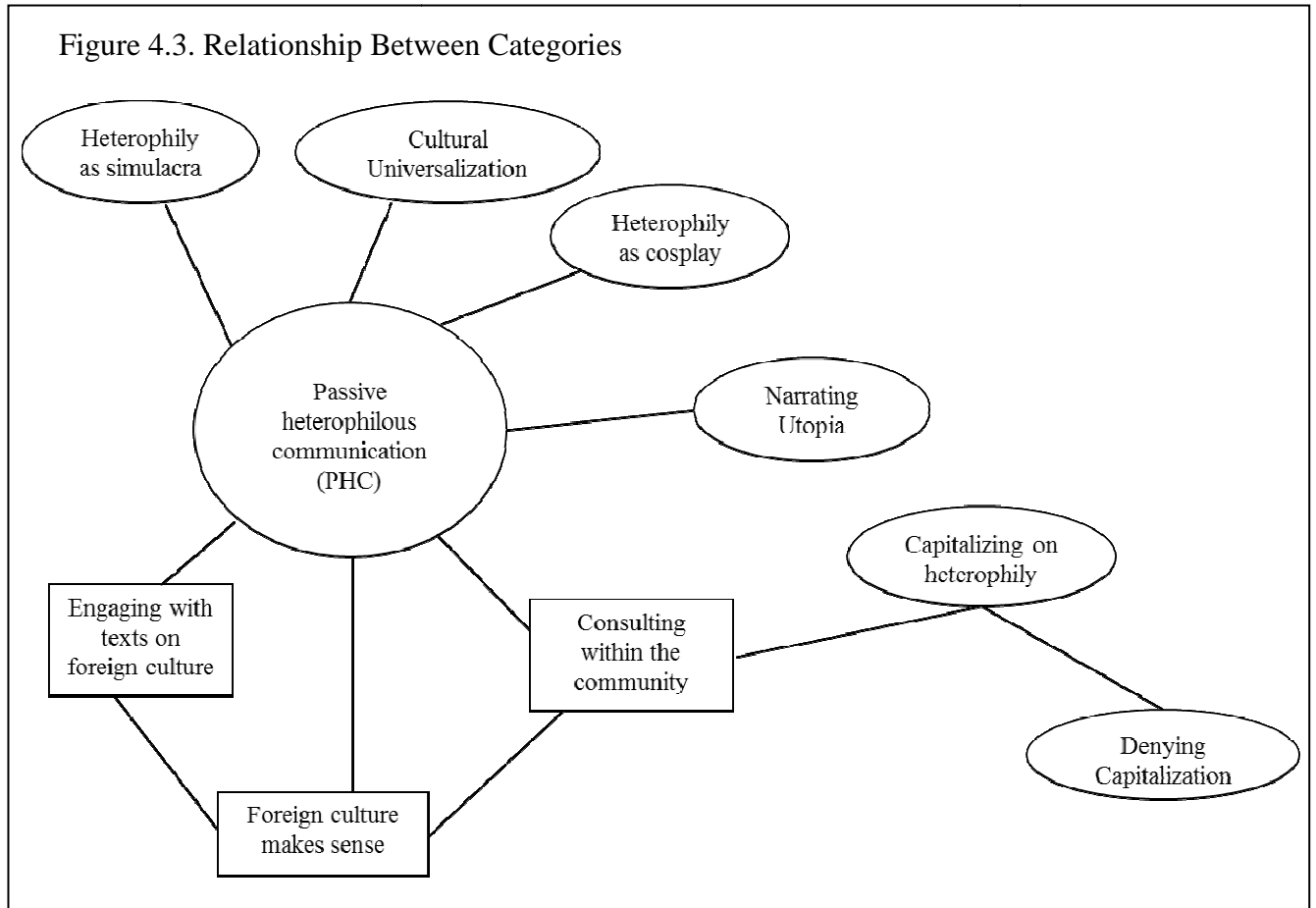
Passive heterophilous communication (PHC) is the axial category around which the other categories revolve and make sense. The paracultural imaginary is constituted by PHC. To recap, PHC is second-hand intercultural communication where members of homophilous communities are gathered together for the purpose of cultural heterophily. Its properties are *engaging with texts*; *consulting within the community*; and *foreign culture makes sense*. The communication interactions of PHC in US-American Buddhist communities take the form of playing with cultural heterophily (*heterophily as cosplay*), making copies of heterophily (*heterophily as simulacra*) and *narrating utopia*.

As stated in the above sections, *capitalizing on heterophily* is a necessary condition for *consulting within the community*. For homophilous individuals to engage with cultural heterophily amongst themselves, there needs to be individuals from the community who have had prior experience with the foreign culture who are able and willing to capitalize on their intercultural experiences to serve as teachers for their peers.

Despite their actions of capitalizing on cultural heterophily, US-American spiritual followers deny that they are capitalizing on their experience of cultural

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[32] Interview transcript, p. 6

heterophily. In their minds, the notion that they are gaining material advantages from participating in religious activity is sacrilegious. *Denying capitalization* and *capitalizing on heterophily* are thus in dialectical tension with each other.

Figure 4.3. Relationship Between Categories

Heterophily as simulacra

Cultural Universalization

Heterophily as cosplay

Passive heterophilous communication (PIIC)

Narrating Utopia

Capitalizing on heterophily

Engaging with texts on foreign culture

Consulting within the community

Denying Capitalization

Foreign culture makes sense

Summary

The diffusion of Others' cultural traditions takes place within homophilous US-American Buddhist communities via passive heterophilous communication. Through the use of texts on foreign culture and supported by the confidence that foreign culture makes sense to them, individuals engage with cultural heterophily to the exclusion of cultural Others. Further, members within the community use their prior experience with foreign

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cultures to serve as gateways for others in their community into those cultures, thereby solidifying the irrelevance of cultural Others in the process of adopting (an)Other culture.

The communication dynamics in homophilous communities engaged in cultural heterophily is a combination of performativity and play. Members of homophilous communities performatively call into being a Buddhist religious/spiritual cultural identity using the behavioral conventions historically sedimented in various Asian cultures. They play with cultural heterophily. The "intercultural" in homophilous settings thus manifests as the appropriation, fetishization and commodification of Other's cultural forms. Such communication behaviors betray an underlying a self-centric approach towards intercultural relations in the domain of religion/spirituality.

Taking a self-centric approach towards relationship with other cultural groups means placing one's wants and needs as central when in relation to cultural others. The emotional attachments, connotative meanings and sedimented conventions of life of other cultural groups are insignificant in determining what and how US-American spiritual followers use the Other cultures' rituals and material artifacts. What is more relevant for those who operate from a self-centric approach is how *they* want to practice the cultural tradition that they have appropriated for themselves.

As a consequence of intercultural experience with Asian Buddhists and Asian Buddhist teachers, white-Caucasian American individuals gain status in the social hierarchy within their communities in the cultural domain of religion/spirituality. From an intercultural communication perspective therefore, the commodification and appropriation of religion/spirituality is more than just about what happens with material culture in the diffusion of cultural traditions. The commodification and appropriation of

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religious/spiritual traditions is also about the conversion of social relations and cultural knowledge into social and cultural capital. These capitals are then used to affect change in the power dynamics between members of said homophilous communities.

However, the materialist and capitalist agendas for engaging with the intercultural in the diffusion of religious/spiritual traditions between cultures are masked by discourses on revering tradition. As a researcher of intercultural communication studies, speaking of the paracultural imaginary thus entails that I speak through the ideologies of religion and culturally learned behaviors of propriety that serve to silence oneself. For members of subordinate cultural groups, the paracultural imaginary is also a moral space for learning how to speak up critically yet compassionately. The paracultural imagination presents the moral challenge to be critical yet compassionate. In the final chapter of the dissertation, I elaborate the specific challenges of writing about the diffusion of cultural traditions in the domain of religion/spirituality as a member of the minority cultural group in the United States who witnesses the paracultural imaginary. I end with a discussion on the theoretical implications of this study as well as suggestions for future research.

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION

"*So powerful it cannot be spoken, so compelling the words gush in inaudible sounds,*

illogical patterns, unintelligible meaning. Or silence. Action behind eyes. A fortress of

thought. Protection. Psychic protection."

- Deborah Wood Holton (1998)

It is naturalized in intercultural communication studies that people prefer to talk to

those who are culturally similar to themselves. Everett Rogers and Bhowmilk (1970)

refer to this particular predilection of human communication as the "homophily principle

of communication." With the assumption that it is "natural" for people to prefer to

communicate with like-others, Rogers (1995) focused on the consequences of interacting

with heterophilous others despite the presence of homophilous others. In the sounds of

first-hand intercultural communication, he heard the *diffusion of innovation*.

In contrast, in this study, I focused on the communication dynamics of those who

prefer interacting with culturally-similar individuals despite the availability and relevance

of heterophilous others. In the silence of second-hand intercultural communication, I hear

the *paracultural imaginary* -- the space where one takes on the cultural vestments of

(an)Other to imagine a utopia where one was the central and only voice in the scene. In

the in-between spaces of the diffusion of religious/spiritual traditions between cultures

where the absence of Other bodies and Other voices meet with cultural heterophily, I hear

the subtle ethnocentrisms and hidden power relations in intercultural communication.

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Despite what I hear, in spite of what I hear, my first reaction to the paracultural imaginary was not speech but silence. Silence is the knee-jerk reaction to communication interactions that make us feel smaller than we are, less present than we are. When we are uncomfortable with that which confronts us, we retreat into silence. The mind that is not yet ready to see the dark side of human communication shrinks into silence. Silence is the false hope that perhaps if we do not act, do not speak, hold our breath… perhaps if we looked the other way, we can continue to indulge in the luxury of quietly avoiding the troublesome task of articulating that which lies beneath the silence, beyond the (non)voice, below the surface of the communication behaviors that we manifest when we find ourselves amongst cultural Others in religion.

In the last chapter of the *Handbook of Critical Intercultural Communication*, Nakayama and Halualani (2010) describe the challenges of employing a critical lens for the study of the intercultural and the communicative in the domain of religion/spirituality:

It is time to employ a critical perspective – one that is well suited to this issue – to engage religion, religious identity, and its connection to historical memory, ethnic and national identity and the forming of a people (in addition to the relationships surrounding gender, sexuality, regionalism, ethnicity, race, class status, and educational standing). Critical intercultural communication scholars need to devise a new vocabulary for engaging with religion. Religion has remained an unexplored area of intercultural interaction but probably not blindly so. Religion is difficult to discuss and even more difficult to analyze from the tools that we currently have as academics. The more we examine religious beliefs, the more elusive they seem to be. (pp. 598 – 599)

In this study of the dynamics of communication in the diffusion of Buddhist cultural traditions into US-America, the particular difficulty of engaging with religion that I met was that of religious ideology and its influence in obscuring the dark side of intercultural communication both for the researcher as well as for the researched.

In terms of critically interrogating the adoption of Buddhist traditions by US-American spiritual followers, the Buddhist religious ideology of being compassionate to others and speaking kindly to others shrouded my mind's-eye. Many times in writing this text as well as when I was in the field, I self-disciplined my words into silence, thinking I was being compassionate in doing so when in reality, what was really happening was that I was shrinking into the comforts of silence.

In terms of decoding research participants' articulation of their journey into Buddhism, religious ideologies that condemn making money from religion, that condemn the commodification of religion, and simplistically condemn any politically incorrect behavior as "just wrong" instead of reflecting on those behaviors and their implications -- all of this makes clear seeing into the dynamics of intercultural interactions difficult.

The difference between my habitual reaction of silence and now is the asking of the question "what is happening here?" Asking this question repeatedly, at every stage of the writing process, has enabled me to peel away from the silence and be able to see the communicative behaviors around me for what they are instead of what I wished they would be. Taking a grounded theory analysis that refused *a priori* determination of what it is that one would find proved to be beneficial for a critical understanding of the communicative behaviors manifested in the domain of religion/spirituality.

Nakayama and Halualani's (2010) ask the following questions to intercultural communication scholars: "Can critical scholars be a force of change… … (or) do we remain fearful of charges of colonialism, cultural imperialism or ethnocentrism, if we speak out against such abuses? What kinds of agency do we have and under what conditions? How best can we activate and maximize such agency to be impactful across all influential contexts" (p. 596). My response from the experience of writing this dissertation is that speaking out against ethnocentrism, cultural imperialism and colonialism should be done with fairness and an open mind, especially if we have been socialized to look away from the dark side of intercultural communication.

As I reflect on the observation and interviews that I conducted in this project, I come to rest on the notion that one of the reasons research on religion is difficult to write about is because the ideology of speaking of others kindly makes pointing out the dark side of intercultural communication when discussing the findings of a study conducted in the domain of religion/spirituality seem rude, unkind, ungrateful and even sinful! A key challenge for intercultural communication scholars interested to conduct research in the domain of religion/spirituality is therefore to learn how to be critical yet compassionate in one's work as a scholar.

I have been with US-American Buddhist communities for five years now. They are my family, just as colleagues from graduate school are my family. To be willing to see the dark side of intercultural communication when the cultural Other whom we critique is someone close to us; to be critical yet compassionate as a scholar; this was the particular form that my challenge of writing up this dissertation took. As I graduate and move on from this dissertation, I look forward to participating in a community of like-

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minded, self-reflexive intercultural communication scholars who are working with similar challenges and are willing to articulate their ways of working with the issue of writing critically yet compassionately about those with whom they study.

Theoretical Implications for Intercultural Communication Study

Previous studies of the white-Caucasian American adoption of Others' religious traditions (i.e., González, 1997; Roberts, 2003) understood the adoption of (an)Other's cultural traditions as the *appropriation* of that culture. These studies were done in settings where both parties -- white-Caucasian American and Native American -- were present in the adoption of Native American religious/spiritual traditions. This study is markedly different from the above in that my research was done in settings where there was primarily one cultural group present (i.e., white-Caucasian American) even though cultural heterophily was central to the communication interaction.

In the eyes of the white-Caucasian American spiritual followers interacting in homophilous communities, their actions were not about appropriating (an)Other's cultural traditions. Instead, they saw what they were doing as using the signs and practices from other cultures to create something of their own. In the following section, I relate the theoretical implications of the findings from this study to the sensitizing concepts that were used at the beginning of the project. In addition, I discuss the theoretical implications of this study for future intercultural communication research.

Cultural Identity

There are currently two studies in intercultural communication on the adoption of Others religious/spiritual traditions. Both de la Garza (1997) and Roberts (2003) centralize the concept of cultural identity in their investigation of the intercultural and

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communicative aspects of the white-Caucasian American adoption of Native American traditions. Their focus is on how individuals develop Native American cultural identities even though they are not Native American by blood-heritage. Development of cultural identity is seen as an individual's responsibility with collective community consequences.

Current intercultural communication theories similarly define cultural identity as a domain that is under the purview of the individual who is participating in intercultural interaction. Cultural identity theory, identity negotiation theory, identity management theory all focus on theorizing the relationship between cultural identity and intercultural communication competence. In all three theories, cultural identity is the characteristic of individuals that is constituted in and by communication interaction.

In studying the communication dynamics of homophilous individuals engaged with cultural heterophily, cultural identity emerged as more than just a property of the individual. Cultural identity is also about how one sees oneself as a cultural being *in relation to* cultural others. In other words, cultural identity is also about the relations *between* cultural groups. It is not just an individual's responsibility and agency.

Cultural identity expresses the power dynamics and hierarchies between cultural groups that are in interaction with each other. Individuals' naturalized understanding of their place in the ethnic hierarchy between cultural groups determines who takes whose culture, who feels privileged to speak about whose culture and whose absence and lack of voice is taken for granted in the diffusion of traditions between cultural groups. One's cultural identity is a reflection of whether one sees oneself as "naturally" occupying a dominant or subordinate place in the ethnic hierarchy.

Thus, I agree with Mendoza et al. (2002) that future intercultural communication research should approach cultural identity as a *project* that involves the suturing of disparate and sometimes contradictory elements to produce a feeling of one-ness, identity, stability and coherence (p. 316). In particular, studying cultural identity as a project using Butler's (1990) concept of performativity directs our attention away from essentializing questions of authenticity to understand the communicative dynamics of "how particular conventions are transported across borders, infused with new meanings and practiced in specific locations" (Mendoza et al., 2002, p. 319).

In addition, the findings from this study demonstrate how a communicative study of cultural identity is also simultaneously an act of addressing the politics of culture – "the play of visibility and invisibility" (Mendoza et al., 2002, p. 319) in the diffusion of cultural traditions. Questions that will be productive for future critical intercultural communication research should go beyond cultural identity as a communicative act of avowal/ascription and face management in an intercultural interaction to include an exploration of how cultural identity is "produced, regulated, for what purposes and whom it excludes" (Mendoza et al., 2002, p. 320).

With regards to the paracultural imaginary, the findings from this study shows that cultural identity is not only founded on instituting the Other through exclusion as suggested in Said's (1979) *Orientalism*. Rather, the development of cultural identity is a two-step process where one first incorporates the Other via the creation of a paracultural imaginary and then excludes the Other from participating in the paracultural imaginary. In addition, unlike in *Orientalism* where the colonialist dominates the discourse on the Other; in the paracultural imaginary, the colonialist dominates the discourse *of* the Other,

rendering the subaltern lost and irrelevant in conversations about their cultural traditions. The grounded theory of paracultural imaginary is currently just at its beginning emergent phase. Future research should be done in other settings to further explore questions into cultural identity in the context of the paracultural imaginary.

Place and Material Culture

Place and material culture were the other two sensitizing concepts with which I began this dissertation project. Intercultural communication research has thus far neglected considerations of setting as well as cultural artifacts in their study of the communicative exchange between cultures (Roth, 2001). In the US-American Buddhist communities where I conducted this research, the use of material culture to create a Buddhist place produced an "arrested, fetishistic mode" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 109) of representing Buddhist religion/spirituality. The colonial gaze of US-American spiritual followers manifested as the fetishized stereotype of Buddhist religion/spirituality in paracultural imaginary. The paracultural imaginary is thus "at once the site of fantasy and desire" and "the sight of subjectification and power" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 108).

Homi Bhabha's (1994) explanation of mimicry in colonial discourse focuses on the significance of the colonized subject's mimicry of the colonial norms. Bhabha (1994) suggests that mimicry is not so much a straightforward act of homage but rather, a space for the subversion of colonial domination. Mimicry is never a perfectly complete replication of the original; there is always a gap. In contrast, my study describes the reverse situation where those who are culturally dominant mimic the forms of those who are culturally subordinate. The US-American mimicry of Asian Buddhist spiritual traditions was not a perfect replication of Asian Buddhist religious forms; there was a gap

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in the adoption and enforcement of behavioral norms. This study suggests that future

research should investigate both forms of mimicry (dominant power mimics the forms of

the culturally subordinate; those who are culturally subordinate mimic the cultural forms

of the dominant powers) for more in-depth articulation of the communicative

consequences of cultural mimicry.

The Definition of Intercultural Communication

In their articulation of cultural identity theory, Collier and Thomas (1988) propose

that "grounded theory needs to be developed in which actual discourse between

interlocutors is examined for its intercultural quality" (p. 99). The authors make this call

in light of the critique that intercultural communication research often begins by defining

cultural difference a priori and then predicting from cultural identities to behavior.

Reflecting on the communication dynamics of intercultural exchange in the

context of the paracultural imaginary, I argue that there is another assumption that is

cornerstone to intercultural communication research that occurs before our *a priori*

definition of cultural difference. In current intercultural communication research, there is

a pervasive assumption that culture matters to communication only when the cultural

identities of the participants are different. This is not so. As seen in US-American

Buddhist communities, culture matters to their communication even though most of the

participants are white-Caucasian ethnic descent. Culture matters in many different ways.

Culture matters as the reason for their communication interaction. Culture matters as the

content of their conversation. Culture matters as a form of cultural and social capital.

In intercultural communication studies, there is an underlying assumption that it is

the cultural identities of communication participants that sets this field apart from

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interpersonal communication. Intercultural communication is different from interpersonal communication in that the participants in the interaction have different cultural identities. The emergent grounded theory of paracultural imaginary suggests that this received notion of intercultural communication restricts the meaning of intercultural communication to the realm of cultural identity. Restricting the meaning of what is "properly intercultural" serves to limit our understanding of the role that culture plays on communication.

As described in the previous chapters, elements of intercultural communication such as hierarchy and prejudice towards other cultures are present even in communication interactions within homophilous communities. I therefore propose that future studies work towards beyond the current definition of intercultural contact to include all communication interactions where cultural heterophily has a role in the interaction, regardless of the cultural identity of the participants. Future research should be conducted to articulate the ways in which intercultural communication takes place in passive, second-hand or even third-hand format.

The Dark Side of Intercultural Communication

Roberts (2003) argues that emotivism is important to communication research because it is an unethical intercultural communication strategy. Emotivism disrupts the coherence of the narrative structure of the cultural group whose traditions are being appropriated. Individuals acting in emotivism display "self-centeredness" (p. 199) in communication interactions. Spiritual followers engaged in the paracultural imaginary also take a self-centric approach towards intercultural relations, albeit with a different nuance. In emotivism, self-centrism takes the form of privileging one's emotional needs

and aesthetic expression in the appropriation of others' cultural forms. In the paracultural imaginary, self-centrism takes the form of a subtle ethnocentrism where one relates to other cultural groups based on a mental schema of ethnic hierarchy. The paracultural imaginary is thus a manifestation of self-centeredness but for a different reason.

The assertion that American Buddhist activity is ethnocentric does not seem to have face value if one looks at the amount of interest US-American spiritual followers display towards learning about the Buddhism, the amount of time and money spent on consuming Asian religious artifacts as well as the manifest changes in the appearance (e.g., black robes) as well as identity markers (e.g., adopting a Buddhist name instead of one's given name) that US-American spiritual followers make when doing Buddhism. In addition, the Buddhist classes and seminars where I conducted research were welcoming of everyone from the general public, regardless of race, nationality and ethnicity. American spiritual followers are keen to spread the word about Buddhism.

Yet, at the same time, by closely studying the bodies that are in the space of Buddhist practice, the (lack of) communication interactions that take place during the learning of Buddhism as well as the voices that are privileged in the teaching of Buddhism, it is apparent that the cultural Other can be "in" the scene but the cultural Other is never really in the scene as a consequential subject. Paracultural imaginaries are constituted by passive heterophilous communication.

Passive heterophilous communication is an insidious form of intercultural communication because it manifests as openness towards other cultural forms and traditions. Underlying the manifest interest in and openness to intercultural exchange, lies a hidden ethnocentrism that is difficult to speak of because in discussing subtle forms of

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intolerance, one begins to wonder if one is being hypersensitive, if one should not just give the other party the benefit of the doubt. Further, out of consideration to avoid upsetting the equilibrium, the delicate balance of comfortable relations with those from other cultural groups, one fears to speak (see Holton, 1998, p. for a discussion on the experiential subtleties of prejudice).

There are many forms of prejudice -- prejudgment, prejudgment with evaluation and prejudgment with negative evaluation (Gardner, 1994). In addition there are many levels of prejudice, e.g., interpersonal, institutional, collective (for elaboration, see Lott, 1995; Maluso, 1995). Expressions of racism and prejudice that are subtle and indirect are the most difficult to respond to because they have a certain deniability (Hecht, 1998, p. 11). It is important for intercultural communication scholarship to continue investigating and articulating the subtle prejudices and hidden power dynamics underlying communication interactions between individuals from different cultural groups.

The Silent Legitimation of Oppression

Why are members of subordinate cultural groups silent when faced with insidious, indirect forms of prejudice? In her discussion on the legitimation of oppression, Wolf (1986) states: "We find revolution against oppression exceedingly rare. Meekness, the inability to resist, and even willing subservience more frequently have been the cornerstones of human response." (p. 217) Wolf suggests that the tendency to respond to unjust intercultural communication situations with meekness is the result of a tripartite of factors: (1) dependency relations, (2) habituation and (3) accommodation.

There are some individuals in every society who find themselves living under conditions of geographic and/or structural isolation. Examples of such individuals include

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are minority cultural members and new immigrants. One of the reactions towards the relative powerlessness of one's social position is to seek out those with more power, knowledge and structural resources who can care for, protect and provide for oneself. In return, the culturally subordinate give those who are culturally dominant their compliance, deference or whatever exchange is perceived as required. Individuals who form relationships from such disadvantaged social locations thus become dependent on powerful others. Such dependency relationships are characterized by disproportionate power relations and denial of equal participation in communication interactions.

Over time, those who are socially disadvantaged become accustomed to the power imbalances in their relationships with those around them. Prolonged immersion in such dependency relations makes their subordinate status seem normal and even inevitable. The culturally subordinate begin to take comfort in their habituated ways of relating to those who are culturally dominant. They learn to accommodate to the small, limited worlds that they are forced to live in.

Wolf (1986) suggests that the oppressed allow themselves to be subordinated to the oppressors' demands because of *conservatism*. In their inability to perceive alternative options of relating to their oppressors, they want to preserve whatever little they have. There is an underlying feeling that "bad as it is, it could be worse; don't rock the boat" (Wolf, 1986, p. 222). They fear that the benefits that they have received in bowing down to the oppressed would be taken away from them. Further, the oppressed perceive themselves in a position of relative advantage (!) in comparison with others who are equally disadvantaged, one's self or immediate group is doing better. In this sense, it is better to keep quiet and tolerate the injustices that one experiences than to speak up.

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In short, Wolf (1986) suggests that members of society who are structurally disadvantaged learn to internalize their inferiority vis-à-vis those in the dominant group. In internalizing their subordinate social location as appropriate and normal, they are reflexively legitimizing their position as culturally subordinate to other groups in society. Individuals internalize the characteristics that are considered appropriate for their inferior status and they internalize the implied obligations for obedience. Their silence is a commitment to the current hierarchical social order in societal.

De la Garza (writing as Gonzalez, 1998) suggests another route of silencing that takes place amongst members of subordinate cultural groups in a society. Instead of individuals acting as agents for their own silencing, members of cultural minority groups step up as *hegemonic police* to ensure that their brethren continue to be part of the subordinate, powerless class in society. Unlike Wolf (1986) who is focusing on the issue of power dynamics in interpersonal relationships, de la Garza (1998) is focusing on the type of prejudice that occurs at the group level. She is focused on power dynamics that is inherent in the hierarchical organization of social life where a small group of individuals has power and authority over the larger majority. In addition, Wolf's (1986) articulation of prejudice focuses on individuals who are both subordinate as a cultural group as well as in their interpersonal relationships with others. De la Garza's articulation of prejudice focuses on individuals who belong to the subordinate cultural group but occupy positions of power and status within the oppressed cultural group.

The hegemonic police are members of oppressed groups who use their status in the group to perpetuate the oppressive structures in society. They silence their brethren from speaking up against the injustices, suffering and oppressive systems around them.

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Like how an individual legitimizes his/her own prejudice because of conservatism, the

hegemonic police "enjoy benefits from their oppression (of fellow group members) and

are afraid of the struggle for liberation if it puts their hierarchically gained privilege at

risk" (González, 1998, p. 230)

Both de la Garza (1998) and Wolf (1986) philosophically theorize the reasons for

keeping silent when one is a minority group member in the face of prejudice. In contrast,

in my study, I postulate the reasons for my own silence by continually reflecting on the

question "what is happening here" in understanding my own behavior during fieldwork.

Despite our understanding of ethnocentrism and prejudice in intercultural communication

research, we are still have much more work to do in terms of theorizing the reasons

behind silence as a response to unjust intercultural communication interactions. Future

research should also be undertaken to investigate this important but silent topic.

Future Research Directions

There are striking similarities between the American Buddhist groups observed in

this research project and Kong's (2012) ethnographic research with an American group

practicing the Japanese tradition of *aikido* martial arts. She describes her *dojo* in this way:

> Hand-written calligraphy with the three characters 'ai-ki-do' hung over the
>
> threshold into the main hall. Cloth dyed with intricate motifs covered the
>
> doorways to tease and please wayward eyes while ensuring the occupants of the
>
> interior space privacy. In the main practice hall, the letter-character 'ki' connoting
>
> energy was placed between two weapons racks for everyone to see. Practitioners
>
> on the mat had taken off their slippers and shoes with toe-side facing out and

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heels touching the borders around the mat, just like the way shoes would be

removed and arranged before entering a house or private quarters in Japan.

The white-Caucasian American practitioners at the aikido dojo where Kong (2012) did

participant observation would refer to each other using the suffix "-san" at the end of

their names. For example, if a student had the name Maria, she would be known as

Maria-san in the aikido space. Everyone in the dojo is dressed in the white uniform used

in Asian martial arts such as karate, judo and taekwondo. In addition, aikido practitioners

use Japanese terminology to refer to their martial arts techniques. One could easily

imagine being in martial arts dojo in Japan if not for the white-Caucasian practitioners in

their white robes.

Like the participants of the Buddhist groups I observed, Kong (2012) describes

the participants at her aikido dojo as not interested in "mimicking Japanese mannerism or

embodying Japanese ethos" (p. 7). Despite the outward Asian manifestations, practicing

aikido was more about developing a life-long practice as well as forming kinship bonds,

than about interest in Japan or Japanese people. Their practice of aikido could very well

be investigated to future theorize the nature of the paracultural imaginary. What are the

communication dynamics of aikido practitioners in homophilous settings? How do they

see their cultural identities in relation to Japanese aikido practitioners? How do their

communication behaviors inform the role of play, performativity and mimicry on

intercultural communication? This is an example of how future research could extend this

emerging theory of the paracultural imaginary.

The paracultural imaginary is that which is constituted by communication where

cultural artifacts, signs, philosophies, rituals and practices are adopted for the creation of

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a better Self. Future research on the paracultural imaginary could be therefore done in any domain of cultural life. It is not a phenomenon unique to Buddhism. For example, future research could investigate whether white-Caucasian American martial arts enthusiasts learning Chinese kung-fu are engaging in some sort of a paracultural imaginary. Future research could also be done in yoga centers in North America that cater primarily to white-Caucasian practitioners. Other examples of settings where the paracultural imaginary could be applied to intercultural communication theorization are Christian study groups in China where everyone is from the Mainland as well as in cosplay meet-ups in Europe among teenagers who learn about Japanese culture online. The possibilities for research are endless. Wherever there is a group of individuals who adopt cultural heterophily because they feel it betters their life to do so, the study of the paracultural imaginary may be conducted.

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APPENDIX A

FIRST INTERVIEW GUIDE (JUNE 2012)

Introduction

Thank you for your time. I am doing a research project to understand the adoption of Buddhism in America. I have been attending Buddhist classes and public talks to learn about the different ways that Buddhism is taught in America. I have also been to different Buddhist Centers to see how Buddhism is expressed in America. I am now doing interviews to learn what Buddhism means to the people who practice Buddhism. The interview would likely take more than an hour, maybe even two hours. I want to talk about three things today--:
1) The things that you do as a Buddhist
   Things and places that are meaningful to you as a Buddhist

Cultural Appropriation

Let's begin by talking about some of the Buddhist things that you do:
- Are there things you do every day that is related to Buddhism?
- How about things you do less often, like weekly or yearly?
- Could you describe the activity to me? What do you do?
- E.g., sitting meditation, walking meditation, chanting, prostration…

Word check: Do you call meditation a ritual? If not, when do you use the word ritual? So, activities such as XXX would be a ritual but activities such as XXX would not be a ritual. What do you call these activities then?

I'm interested to know how you came to know about these rituals.
- Why do you do this ritual daily/ weekly/ yearly?
- What does doing the ritual mean to you?
- I have heard of people doing this ritual but I'm not sure what it signifies or stands for. What does this ritual mean?
- (if no meaning) What does it mean to you? Why do you do it?
- (if mystical explanation) Why does this explanation resonate with you? What do you take this explanation to mean?

(if not mentioned) When the person taught you the ritual…
- Did he or she tell you where it was from?
- Is it important to know the history behind the ritual? Why/ why not?
- Is it important to you if you were told that this ritual is also done in other (Asian) Buddhist communities? Why/ why not?

Has the way you practice the ritual changed from what you were taught?
- (If ritual has been adapted or changed) Do you remember why you / your community decided to change the ritual?
- (if ritual has not been adapted or changed) Were there instances where you were tempted to change parts of the ritual? Why did you decide not to change?

- What does it mean when someone changes a ritual or tradition? What does changing a tradition mean to you?

So, to wrap up this section of the interview…
- How important is knowing these rituals that we talked about? Can someone call themselves a Buddhist if they do not do these rituals?
- Are there instances where individuals are in the Buddhist community for a long time but refuse to do certain rituals, e.g., chanting, prostration, etc. How do Buddhists view these people?
- There are some people who just know what to do when they are in Buddhist gatherings. Like they memorize their chants, they prostrate at the right time, they know how to do the different meditations… is knowing what to do important to being a "good" Buddhist?
- Is there such a thing as a competent Buddhist?

Material culture

Now I want to move our interview to another topic. I would like to spend the next 20minutes or so talking about the things and places that are meaningful to you as a Buddhist.

Could you give me a tour of your Buddhist Center (or your meditation place)? I am interested to see the things that are significant to you.
- Why did you choose to display the object in this way?

If I went to your house and asked for a tour of the spaces that are important to you as a Buddhist, what would you show me?
What are some things that are important to you as a Buddhist?
- Is there a story behind this object?
- Why did you choose to by this one? What were you looking out for?
  - (additional prompts): What does it mean to you?
- Is this your first XXX? How did you learn how to use this object?
- Do you know where your XXX came from?
- Would knowing how the people in the culture / country originally used this object affect how you use the object?
- Where are these items displayed? How are they displayed?
- Do you mind drawing a map for me?
- Why did you display them in this way?

Are there other things are places that are meaningful to you as a Buddhist but we haven't talked about? They may be things you do not yet own but aspire to have… or places that you aspire to visit.
- What are these things or places?
- Why are they meaningful to you?

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Authenticity in Cultural Appropriation

So far we have talked about the activities you do and the things and the places that are important to being Buddhist. Now I want to spend the next couple of minutes to talk about other issues that might be important or significant to being Buddhist.

What are some resources you would recommend to beginning Buddhists?
- Are there resources that are not suitable for beginning Buddhists?
- What are some criteria you use to decide whether to attend a Buddhist talk or a lecture or a class?
- What makes some resources or classes better than others?

I have heard some people refer to famous names like Dalai Lama or Thich Nach Hanh to decide what books to buy or what events to attend.
- Do you think famous names are important?
- Why do you think some people focus on famous names?

- Is there such a thing as "fake Buddhists?
- What makes someone a fake Buddhist?
- Why might someone accuse another person as a fake Buddhist?
- What makes someone a "real Buddhist"?

On a broader scale, do you think that there is such a thing as "real Buddhism" or "authentic Buddhism"?
- What makes something a more authentic Buddhism?
- What makes something a less authentic Buddhism?
- What makes someone's Buddhism authentic?

Wrapping Up

We are nearing the end of the interview. I just have a few more questions.

Demographic Information

Do you mind spelling for me your name?

In my report, I will assign you a pseudonymn so your identity will not be so easily recognized. Do you have a preference for the name you want to go by?

Do you mind telling me your age or age range?

Could I also ask for your ethnicity?

Ah… we didn't discuss when you became a Buddhist! So, how long have you been Buddhist? What made you interested in Buddhism?

Adoption of Buddhist Name

Some people have a Buddhist name. Do you have a Buddhist name?
- What is your Buddhist name?
- How did you come to have this Buddhist name?
- What is the significance to you, of having a Buddhist name?
- Do you always use this Buddhist name wherever you go?
- I notice that Buddhist names tend not to be in English. What if you were given something that sounds English (e.g., Lotus Mindful)? How would that be different from its foreign-sounding equivalent?
- How about a Buddhist name that sounded French or German? What difference does it make to you?

Material Needs of Buddhist Organization

Finally, some people belong to more than one Buddhist group.
- Do you belong to a Buddhist group currently?
- Does the Buddhist group that you belong to collect membership dues? What are the dues like? Where do they go? What do you think about Buddhist groups collecting membership fees?
- There are other ways that Buddhist groups collect donations, e.g., events, sale of books. What are your thoughts on the sale of items at Buddhist events / talks? What is your thought on the collection of donations for Buddhist events?
- What causes do you think Buddhist donations should go towards contributing or compensating? Why these causes?

Ending

Thank you very much for your time. I am going to use the information that I gather from these interviews and observations to write about the adoption of Buddhism by Americans.

Is there anything you want to add to your answers? Or anything you can think about that is related to these issues but we didn't get a chance to discuss.

Is there anything you want to ask me about my project?

APPENDIX B

SECOND INTERVIEW GUIDE (JULY 23, 2012)

Introduction

Thank you for your time.

I am doing a research project to understand the adoption of Buddhism in America. I have been attending Buddhist classes and public talks to learn about the different ways that Buddhism is taught in America. I have also been to different Buddhist Centers to see how Buddhism is expressed in America. I am now doing interviews to learn what Buddhism means to the people who practice Buddhism. The interview would likely take more than an hour, maybe even two hours. Mainly, I want to talk about three things today --:
1) How and why you became a Buddhist
2) What does it mean to be a Buddhist and learning / teaching Buddhism?

Initiation and Beginning Stories

Let's begin at the beginning of your journey into Buddhism.
I'm curious to know how you first learned about Buddhism

- Who or what introduced you to Buddhism?
- How old were you? Where were you?
- How did you know where to go?
- What questions did you have when you first learned about Buddhism?
- What was your main focus at that time? What was important to you?
- How did you go about learning what you were interested in? Who taught you what you wanted to know? What resources did you turn to?
- Why were you interested in these things?
- If it's not too personal, why were the answers to these questions important to you? What were you searching for?

Did you become a Buddhist there and then? How did you "become" a Buddhist?
- What did you have to do? Is there like a baptism equivalent?
- How do you know what to do?
- I've had several people tell me they didn't know what was going on. What was your experience like? How did you make sense of your experience?
- If knowing exactly what everything meant is not the most important thing to you, what was?
- My idea is that people usually like to know what was going on; why this was not important to you at that time?
- In retrospect, would you have done anything differently?

Would you consider yourself a religious person from young? Have you always been interested in religion? Why?

How different is Buddhism from the religion that you grew up with?

- When the people you know think of Buddhists, what do they usually think of? Is this different from how you define yourself as a Buddhist?
- To you, what is a Buddhist? Is there something that makes someone characteristically Buddhist?
  I hear phrases like, "that is so Buddhist." What do people mean when they say that? How is that different from, "that is so Christian"?

What is Important to the Journey into Buddhism?

What made Buddhism interesting or attractive to you?
- Was your interest because of certain teachings? Ideas? Concepts? People? Events? Incidents?
  o Why did these _____ appeal to you?
- What were you looking for?
- What did you want? What was important?
- What kept you going on, wanting to learn more about Buddhism?

What events are important to your journey in Buddhism? E.g., defining moments.

Is there a place that is significant to your journey of becoming a Buddhist? Do you have pictures? Will you be willing to share them with me for my research?
- Are there things of sentimental value in this journey?
- Are there things that hold memories of Buddhism for you?

Buddhist Teacher

Some people tell me their teacher is important to their journey in Buddhism. How about for you? How important is having a teacher?
- How did you choose your Buddhist teachers?
- Were your teachers all Americans? Were they all White?
- Some people prefer to learn from Asian teachers; others prefer to learn from Americans. How about you? Does it matter?
- Some people prefer to learn from monks or nuns. Does that matter to you?

Buddhist Name

How about Buddhist name? How important is having a Buddhist name to you?
- What is the significance of having a Buddhist name?
- I notice that Buddhist names tend not to be in English. What if you were given something that sounds English (e.g., Lotus Mindful)? How would that be different from its foreign-sounding equivalent?

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- How about a Buddhist name that sounded French or German? What difference does it make to you?
  How important is having a Buddhist name to being a Buddhist?

Use of Foreign Language

Some people I have met in Buddhist events and classes use Sanskrit or Pali terms when they speak. How important is being able to use these terms?
- How important is knowing foreign language terms to being a Buddhist?
- If a teacher uses only English terms, does it make him less credible?
- Why do you use the foreign language term rather than the English term? What does the foreign language do for you?

Learning Buddhism

Going back to the beginning of the journey, what was most challenging when you were learning / doing XXX?
- Were there things that didn't make sense to you?
- How did you know what to do?
- Were there practices that "turned you off" or you just don't do? Why? Do you do them now? What made you change your mind?

One of the reasons why I'm interested in people learning Buddhism is because I see it as you are learning an Asian religion.
- How do you see Buddhism? Is Buddhism an Asian religion?
- Were there any cultural aspects you had to get past to understand Buddhism? Were there aspects of Buddhism that you found difficult to understand? Was the challenge in any way related to cultural differences?
- Were there things that you thought were not culturally specific, i.e., universal? What does it mean that a value is "universal" vs. specific?
- These teachings come 2500 years ago from India. Why are they still relevant to you today?

Social Aspect of Religion/Spirituality Adoption

So, how long have you been a Buddhist?
- What does being a Buddhist entail? I'm interested to know about the meetings or activities that you attend regularly. How frequently? What do you usually do at these meetings? Why do you gather? Do you usually go with someone?
- Is there a regular crowd? Who is usually present at these meetings? What is the age range of the majority? Are they mainly Americans? All white?
- Who leads these activities or meetings?
- Is there are teacher?
Why do you do attend these meetings?
- What does doing _____ / going to _____ mean to you?

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- (if no meaning) Why do you do it?
- (If mystical terms like vibration, energy, aura…etc. are used) What is another word to understand XXX?

<u>Word check</u>: What is refuge? What is tradition? What is lineage?

Cultural Aspect of Religion/Spirituality Adoption

Now let's talk a little bit in terms of your day to day life. Are there changes you made to your life after you became a Buddhist?
- Are there changes to your daily schedule?
- Are there changes to your living space / environment?
- Are there changes to your diet?

What practices do you do?
- Who taught you? Did you have different versions over the years? How do you choose which practice to do?
- Could you explain the practice to me? Where is this practice from?
- Why do you do this practice? What is the benefit of doing this practice?

Has Buddhism changed your life in some way?
- What's different in your life now that you are Buddhist?
- How do you tell that that _____ has changed?

Material Needs

Let's now focus on Buddhist events.

Have you ever been involved in the organizing of a Buddhist event?
- What was the event about?
- Who was allowed to attend it?
- Was there a cost involved?
- What were the main considerations when creating a Buddhist event? Is this different from organizing other types of events? Are there considerations that are unique to creating a Buddhist event?

1) Events often ask for a donation. Sometimes it says price. When you organize events, how do you decide between calling it *donation* or *price*?
- **DONATION**: Are there instances where the exchange is a form of payment rather than a donation? How are the terms donation, payment and gift understood differently? How about suggested donation? Why is it important to add the word suggested?
- **GIFT**: Other people I talked to also used the word gift to refer to what they were giving. Are there instances where you would consider what you are giving as a payment as opposed to a gift? Are there instances where the exchange is a form of payment rather than a gift? Why do people use the word "gift"?

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2) There are different ways of giving a donation. Sometimes people put it in an envelope. Sometimes there is a donation box. Is showing money considered taboo in Buddhist events?

- Other than how much to charge for the event, were there other considerations that the group had in terms of fees?
- **OBLIGATION**: The idea that there shouldn't be any obligation when it comes to giving a donation was mentioned by other people I talked to. Why is it important that giving does not become an obligation?

3) At Buddhist centers, there is often a place where people request for membership dues and donations. They sometimes tell you where this money is spent. The question of where the money is going seems important in America. What do you think is driving this need to know where the money is going? Why do you think people ask these questions?

Teaching Buddhism

Have you ever been asked to lead a group or to teach Buddhism in any way?

- What are some things you teach? What do you teach most often?
- Who tends to come to these classes? What are some common questions that you get asked? What do people usually want to know?
    - How important is history or origin?
    - How important is famous names?
- What are some techniques you have found to be helpful to explain XX or teach XX to people?
- How do you usually organize the flow of teaching? What materials do you use to prepare for teaching?
- Do you have favorite course? Why is this your favorite course?
- What do you think is most beneficial for Americans to learn?
- What do you think Americans are most interested to learn in Buddhism?

Are there objects that you use while you are teaching?

- Where are they from? (If Asia, why bring from Asia?)
- How do you usually use it? Why do you use it in this way?
- Anyone else uses this?

The issue of change:

- Have you changed the way you teach?
- Which techniques have you found to be less useful for teaching? What made you notice that they were not working?

IF NO: Would you consider teaching Buddhism if someone asked you? Would you be comfortable teaching? What would you teach if you were asked to teach Buddhism? Why do you choose to teach this aspect of Buddhism?

Mental Frameworks in the Adoption of Buddhism

So, to wrap up the interview…
- Are there basic expectations / standards to call yourself a Buddhist.
- Are there certain things you should know or learn?
- Is there such a thing as a competent Buddhist or an incompetent Buddhist? Is there a "good" Buddhist?
- What if I were to not do certain rituals, e.g., chanting, prostration, etc, when other people are doing it, how would Buddhists view someone like me?
- Is there an "ideal" or model Buddhist that we could look to as an examplar of who a Buddhist should be?

In some lineages, they like to emphasize the term "tradition." In your form of Buddhism, how important is keeping to tradition? How is the term "tradition" understood?
- Is tradition somehow indicative of "real Buddhism" or "authentic Buddhism?" Is there such a thing as "authentic Buddhism"?
- Finally, what are some things you would like to do in the future that are related to Buddhism?

Wrapping Up

Demographic Information

Do you mind spelling for me your name?

In my report, I will assign you a pseudonymn so your identity will not be so easily recognized. Do you have a preference for the name you want to go by?

Do you mind telling me your age or age range?

Could I also ask for your ethnicity?

Ending

Thank you very much for your time. I am going to use the information that I gather from these interviews and observations to write about the adoption of Buddhism by Americans.

Is there anything you want to add to your answers? Or anything you can think about that is related to these issues but we didn't get a chance to discuss.

Is there anything you want to ask me about my project?

APPENDIX C

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

To: Eric Margolis
               ED

From: Mark Roosa, Chair
               Soc Beh IRB

Date: 12/07/2011

Committee Action: **Exemption Granted**

IRB Action Date: 12/07/2011

IRB Protocol #:   1111007134

Study Title: Exploring Identity, Materiality and Place in Intercultural Communication

The above-referenced protocol is considered exempt after review by the Institutional Review Board pursuant to Federal regulations, 45 CFR Part 46.101(b)(2).

This part of the federal regulations requires that the information be recorded by investigators in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects. It is necessary that the information obtained not be such that if disclosed outside the research, it could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability, or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

You should retain a copy of this letter for your records.