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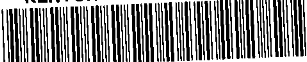
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# BUDDHISM IN THE UNITED STATES

The attention focused on people of Japanese ancestry in the United States has aroused interest -- and misunderstanding -- as to what Buddhism, the religion of more than half these people, stands for, what it stood for in Japan in relation to Shintoism or "emperor-worship", and what it stands for in the United States in relation to American and Christian institutions.

## Buddhism and Shintoism in Japan.

In the United States the principal differences between Buddhism and Shintoism are not always clearly understood.

Buddha, from which the name Buddhism comes, is a title meaning the Knower or the Fully Enlightened One. Gautama, a prince of India, was the Buddha who, at the age of 35 after six years of seeking truth, founded the religion in the sixth century before Christ. On reaching manhood he renounced the life of a prince for that of a wandering ascetic to seek a way to help humanity. Finally, he gave up his ascetic ways and sat down under the now fomous Bo-tree until he attained the enlightenment he sought. Then until he died, at the age of 80, he taught his belief that the best kind of life avoided extremes of pleasure and self-mortification, and took the "Middle Way" which leads to calmness and understanding, and eventually to the apex of perfection, Nirvana. "The Eight-Fold Path" of the Middle Way is a code of ethics for good living.

Around these beliefs, various rites and symbols have developed. The lotus whose blossoms rise above their muddy roots; the picture of Buddha as visualized by the artists among his followers; the candles bringing light into darkness; the burning incense which symbolizes the worthlessness of man until he realizes his potentialities; a gong and meditation beads to help in meditating on the Middle Way and the Wheel of Life above which the Buddhist aspires to rise, are all part of the religion.

In Japan, as a whole, there are some eight major sects which are subdivided into innumerable lesser groups, each with slightly different rites and beliefs. Buddhism, very popular among all classes of society, contributed much to the culture and well-being of Japan. Besides influencing the arts, social life, morals, and ethics, it worked in the fields of social welfare and secular education.

Buddhism entered Japan through Korea about the sixth century after some eleven centuries of spreading from one oriental country to another. Ever since, Shintoism and Buddhism have been closely intertwined in Japanese history and have constituted a source of differences among political groups. After Buddhism had entered Japan, the name Shinto, meaning "way of the gods",

was adopted to distinguish the old native religion from the new arrival. Of the three major kinds of Shintoism found in Japan, the most popular among the common people centers about the old native beliefs in gods of the household, fields, and wayside. Though Buddhism and this popular form of Shinto took over rites and beliefs from each other, they have never completely fused at any time. The common man, for instance, believes in Buddhism for the sake of his soul and in the Shinto gods to protect and guide him in daily affairs.

Besides this popular and relatively unorganized Shintoism, there is a more exclusive kind which is organized into sects. These sects, many of which believe in healing by faith, are not likely to tolerate a belief in Buddhism among their followers.

The third kind of Shintoism is that best known to the American public as "emperor-worship". This is State Shintoism, carefully fostered by the national government, united with the political system of Japan and taught in its schools. Based on traditions that the emperor is descended from the Sun Goddess and that the gods created the Japanese and their islands, State Shintoism fosters belief in the divinity of the emperor and the purity of the Japanese race. Of relatively late development in Japan, it did not become the official national cult until about 1868. The same political upheaval which made this form of Shintoism the State religion gave Buddhism a severe setback. As a consequence of the political conflict, the royal family withdrew from the Buddhist order; temples and priests were attacked; and efforts were made to destroy Buddhism. However, the people of the nation so resisted governmental efforts to eliminate Buddhism that it was permitted to exist, but only as one of several religions subordinate to State Shintoism.

After this period of hardship, Buddhism revived, undertook new missionary and welfare activities, and began to evolve methods of cooperation among its sects. Three of the sects, for example, founded The United Buddhist University, and in 1918 The Interdenominational Association was organized to represent all leading Buddhist sects, except the Nichiren, in their dealings with the imperial government. The Nichiren sect, which is weakly represented in the United States, has more Shinto symbolism and nationalistic tendency than other sects. The Shin and the Zen sects, on the other hand, resisted State Shintoism. Both the Shin and the Zen are represented among the American Buddhist sects.

Buddhism in the United States Before Evacuation.

Buddhism was introduced into the United States and Hawaii by Japanese immigrants. In 1940, of an estimated 56,000 Buddhists in the United States, 55,000 were of Japanese ancestry. The remainder included Caucasians, who, in the 1930's founded The Buddhist Brotherhood in America at Los Angeles, where most Caucasian Buddhists live. The Brotherhood is non-sectarian but has cooperated in religious affairs with Japanese Buddhist sects and has won converts to non-sectarian Buddhism among young Buddhists of Japanese ancestry. Another prominent non-sectarian organization of Buddhists is

The International Buddhist Institute, founded in 1927 by Buddhists of varied racial and national backgrounds.

Of the eight major Buddhist sects found in Japan, six are represented in the United States and Hawaii. The six are Shin, Shingon, Zen, Nichiren, Tendai, and Jodo. Only the first four sects named are numerically important in the United States, and of them the Shin is by far the strongest, having a membership that is estimated to include three-fourths of the Buddhists in this country. Next in order of size to the Shin are the Shingon, Zen, and Nichiren sects. The four maintained separate organizations in the United States, and until evacuation of people of Japánese ancestry from the west coast were often out of touch with each other.

The Shin sect. The importance in the United States of the Shin sect reflects its strength in Japan, for it was, and still is, strong in the rural districts whence many Japanese came to this country. The simplicity of this sect, the so-called Protestantism of Buddhism, has appealed to the common people since St. Shinran founded it in 1224. He believed that only faith in Amida Buddha and frequent repetition of the formula, Namu Amida Butsu, (Homage to Amida Buddha), were necessary for the salvation of the soul. The minimum of ceremony and little stress on metaphysical doctrine in the Shin sect contrast with the formality and ritual of other sects. For instance, the Shin use tablets instead of images of Buddha, and its priests are allowed to eat meat and marry.

The Shin denomination, especially as operating through the organization of the Nishi subsect in The Buddhist Mission Church, has maintained itself and become the leading sect in the United States for several reasons. Besides maintaining its membership among the foreign-born who had belonged to the denomination in Japan, the Shin sect seems to have been more adaptable, probably because of the simplicity of its ceremonies and doctrines, to the culture of the United States and so more appealing to members of the second generation. However, it has suffered disorganization as a result of evacuation and its membership has declined.

In 1936 the Census of Religious Bodies reported that the Shin had 14,388 adult members. An estimated average of three members of each Buddhist family belonged to the church, which would have given the Shin sect in 1936 a total of about 43,164 members.

Though the Shin denomination has ten subsects in Japan, only two are represented in the United States. They are the Nishi Hongwanji (West Mission) and the Higashi Hongwanji (East Mission), and of them the Nishi subsect has by far the greater number of members.

In 1898, all members of the Nishi were united into The Buddhist Mission of North America by the Reverends Sonada and Nishijima of Kyoto, Japan. Then, in 1905, when the first Buddhist church in the United States was built in San Francisco, the Kyoto headquarters of the Nishi chose Reverend Sonada as the first Bishop. The Kyoto headquarters has continued to select the bishops, the fifth of whom is the Reverend R. Matsukage, who is now at the Central Utah Relocation Center in Topaz but maintains contact

as head of The Buddhist Mission, with six Nishi churches located in the free zone. They are in Denver and Fort Lupton, Colorado; Mesa, Arizona; Salt Lake City and Ogden, Utah; and New York City.

Besides appointing the Bishop, the Kyoto headquarters has also contributed 3000 yen a year toward his salary and has trained young men from the United States for the priesthood. However, few Nisei followed the Japanese custom of the eldest son of a priest adopting his father's profession. Most of the priests in the American Buddhist churches were born in Japan, and after being trained there for the priesthood were sent to the United States to conduct congregations. These priests are supported by their congregations, not by the denomination as a whole, or, as in the case of the Bishop, by the Kyoto headquarters.

The Buddhist Mission of North America is organized into a hierarchy with the Bishop at the head. The principal Mission temple is at 1881 Pine Street in San Francisco. Under the Bishop are two deans and seventy-one lesser bishops and clergymen of whom six are Caucasians. At the time of evacuation, the Mission consisted of about 35 temples and churches and more than double that number of less formally organized congregations, which were divided into seven dioceses, each with a temple and bishop subordinate to the Chief Bishop in San Francisco. Four of the dioceses are in California, while the other three are in the states to the north and east. The seven dioceses of the Buddhist Mission and their headquarters are as follows:

| Diocese | Headquarters |
|---|---|
| Northern California | San Francisco |
| Southern California | Los Angeles |
| Central California | Fresno |
| Coastal California | Guadalupe |
| Northern | Seattle |
| Middle estern | Salt Lake City |
| Denver | Denver |

In Japan, the priests have complete responsibility for financing and maintaining the temples, but in the United States the Buddhist churches are incorporated under state laws with the church officers responsible for finances, policies, and administration. Although some churches encouraged the appointment of American citizens as officers, the churches were actually controlled by priests and Issei leaders.

<u>The Shingon or Odaishi sect.</u> The sect next in size to the Shin in the United States is the Shingon, which was founded in 806 by Kobo Daishi. More highly ritualized and metaphysical than the Shin sect, the Shingon denomination has attracted the more conservative, older people, who also depend, especially in Hawaii, on the priests as faith healers. The influence of popular Shintoism is apparent in its tendency toward pantheism and its doctrine that the "Great Sun" is the source of all.

<u>The Zen sect.</u> The Zen sect is small in the United States, although

a subsect, the Soto, is practiced to some extent in Hawaii. Encouraged as a religion for the Samurai, the warrior class, the Zen sect emphasizes stoicism, meditation, and stern self-discipline through which, the followers believe, a man can save himself without depending on the gods. Though it strongly influenced philosophical thought after its founding in 1191, it was not a sect for the common people.

<u>The Nichiren sect</u>. The Nichiren sect is the weakest of the [illegible]inations in the United States and Hawaii. Established in Japan in 1253, it represented a rebellion against older sects, and tended to attract zealots. Unlike other Buddhist sects, it did not dissociate itself from Japanese nationalistic thought and its symbolism combines the Sun of Shintoism with the Lotus of Buddhism.

Conflicts among sects and between sectarians and non-sectarians were stimulated among the Buddhists as a result of evacuation from the west coast. Before evacuation, the sects had little contact with each other, but at the relocation centers they came together to form the United Buddhist Church. The board of trustees was made up of representatives from all groups. Priests of the different groups took turns in conducting services, but at each service the peculiar ritual needs of each sect were given consideration. The tendency was not toward the elimination of all sectarian differences of doctrine and rites. Still the fear that such a leveling might occur as the result of the newly organized United Buddhist Church led to anxieties and conflicts.

In <u>Poston</u>, for instance, the four Buddhist sects and the non-sectarians agreed at first that none would hold separate services but all would participate in the services of the United Buddhist Church. Later, however, members of the numerically dominant Shin sect withdrew from the United Church to resume their former sectarian rites.

At the <u>Heart Mountain Relocation Center</u>, splits also occurred in The United Buddhist Church despite the vigorous resistance of its board of trustees. Not only did this center have doctrinal differences as at Poston, but also financial problems which developed among the priests.

Both subsects of the Shin denomination, the numerically large Nishi and the less prominent Higashi, are represented at Heart Mountain. However, since Nishi leadership was weakened at the time of evacuation by the internment of many of its priests and outstanding laymen, it happened that the ranking member of the Shin priesthood at the center was a Higashi. Gaining the support of a Nishi priest, he proposed that the financial contributions from the congregations of The United Buddhist Church be pooled and equally divided among the priests. The congregation itself, not the denomination as a whole, it will be recalled, pays the salaries of the priests. Other priests with a larger following than the two mentioned objected that such an arrangement would cheat them out of the salaries they were entitled to and withdrew from The United Buddhist Church.

Doctrinal differences at Heart Mountain were due to the Nichiren sect, which after a time withdrew from the United Church. This sect, as mentioned above, has a nationalistic tendency, and later its priest went to the segregation center.

At the Jerome Center, the split in The United Buddhist Church was due neither to financial or doctrinal differences but to a political schism. Until registration for the army occurred, the course of the Church was fairly smooth, but at that time twelve of the trustees of the Church requested three other board members to resign. The twelve members feared that the hostility of the three to registration would make Buddhism appear to be a pro-Japanese religion. The three dissenters resigned, and with three priests and a following of about 300 people established the Daijo Bukkyo Church. Most of them were repatriates and were suspiciously regarded as pro-Japan by other evacuees. When segregation took place, this Church disbanded.

In all centers, the general tendency is for the older Buddhists to cling to the pre-evacuation sectarian lines. Their services, though conducted by Japanese priests, show many Christian influences.

The growth of non-sectarianism was favored by life at the centers. Indications are that it is getting further stimulus from the relocation of young Buddhists outside the centers, for they tend to favor non-sectarianism in planning new services. Though the young group is financially weak, its experiences in organization are greater than before evacuation. It was the young Buddhists who, after evacuation had disorganized Buddhism, took the initiative in establishing the Buddhist church at the centers. At first many evacuees hesitated to admit being Buddhists for fear of being thought "foreign", but reassurances from the War Relocation Authority of the freedom of religion soon drew Buddhists together again and The United Buddhist Church was organized. Later as the old people became more secure, they took control of the church administration as formerly, but the position of the young Buddhists was stronger.

The non-sectarian Buddhist Brotherhood of America, an organization led by Rev. Julius Goldwater of Los Angeles, has offered to absorb the Young Buddhist Association. Although the Association has been unwilling to accept affiliation with the Brotherhood, it has a closer informal relationship with the non-sectarian Brotherhood since evacuation.

The future for sectarian Buddhism in the United States seems uncertain at present. It faces threats to its continuance not only from the inclination of young Buddhists to favor non-sectarianism or greatly modified sectarianism but from the preference of an increasing number for Christianity. Besides the loss of young members, the Issei Buddhists have another problem, a dilemma immediately involving themselves. Until they begin to relocate, the center of Buddhism in the United States will continue to be the relocation centers, and yet one of the reasons for their hesitation to relocate is the lack of Buddhist churches "outside". Another problem is to fill the ranks of the priests. Before evacuation most sectarian priests were born and educated in Japan, the priesthood did not attract

Nisei before the war, and now there is a marked trend among the Nisei to follow less sectarian lines or to leave Buddhism altogether.

Life at the centers profited the sectarian Buddhists in some respects. Whereas the four sects, the Shin, Shingon, Zen, and Nichiren, had maintained almost no contact with each other before evacuation, project life has brought members of different denominations into contact with each other and created some cooperation among them in religious matters. Because most Buddhists in America are of Japanese ancestry and most are at the centers, they know they cannot depend on "outside" financial aid as do the Christian congregations at the center to maintain their religious existence. This realization makes the members of the different sects more aware of the need for cooperation. Center life also accelerated the trend, which until Pearl Harbor had been gradual, of modifying the sects to compete with Christianity and to adapt themselves to the culture of the United States.

The following percentages indicate the relative place of those in the relocation centers claiming Buddhism, Christianity, other religions, or no religion, and the proportion of Issei and Nisei in each group. The figures are based on approximately 25% of the individual records from each of the ten relocation centers.

Religious Membership in Relocation Centers

| | |
|---|---|
| Buddhism | 55.3% |
| Shinto | 0.4 |
| Catholic | 2.0 |
| Protestant | 28.8 |
| Mormon | 0.1 |
| None or not answered | 13.4 |
| N = 27, 180 | 100 % |

Relationship of Nativity and
Religious Membership in Relocation Centers

| Religion | Nativity<br>American born | Foreign born |
|---|---|---|
| Buddhism | 48.5% | 68.5% |
| Shinto | 0.2 | 0.7 |
| Seicho-no-Iye | * | 0.1 |
| Catholic | 2.4 | 1.2 |
| Protestant | 32.4 | 21.8 |
| Mormon | 0.2 | 0.1 |
| None or not answered | 16.3 | 7.6 |
| | 100% | 100% |
| | N = 18,064 | N = 9,116 |

*Less than 0.5%

BUDDHISM AND CHRISTIANITY IN THE UNITED STATES

Especially as regards young, unmarried people, the Buddhist Church has faced competition with the Christian Church from the early days of Japanese immigration to the present and has undergone many changes under the influence of its contacts with Christianity and American life. The effect of the adjustments of Buddhism to occidental culture and competition with Christianity was to make it a strong force in assimilating the Japanese into American life. After losing ground in the early days of immigration, Buddhism firmly established itself and increased its congregations. Now the Buddhists are again losing ground to the Christians. Old people are today more likely to cling to Buddhism than are the young; and residents of rural areas seem to maintain Buddhist membership more than do those of city areas.

During the first years of immigration, young unmarried males turned to Christianity instead of to Buddhism because the Christian churches offered opportunities for Americanization, which, together with the employment bureaus that the churches set up, gave the immigrants hopes for better jobs and a quicker return to Japan. Also, the Christian churches undertook to meet the needs of these men for social life, even setting up marriage bureaus. Later when the immigrants began to raise families, the kindergartens which the churches organized for children of working parents gave both children and parents opportunities to familiarize themselves with American customs and language.

Because in Japan social opportunities of the kind offered in the United States by Christian churches had been a function of the family system and not of religious organizations, the Buddhist churches, when first established in the United States, did not offer their members the attractions and benefits that the Christian churches did. To the immigrant, therefore, the Christian church, not his traditional native religion, was doing for him some of the things his family would have done in the homeland.

However, as Buddhist churches were built and the men married and had families, some returned to their former religion, drawn by sentimental attachment to memories of their youth, familiarity with Buddhist rites, a desire to have Buddhist birth ceremonies for their children, and the satisfaction of hearing services in Japanese.

This early experience of the Issei with the Christian churches left its mark, for they later used it to good effect in fitting American social techniques into the Buddhist Church. Though the major purpose in doing this was to draw the second generation to Buddhism and thus insure its survival in America, parents made relatively little objection when the children, as many still do, attended both Buddhist and Christian churches, or under the influence of friends would become Christians while their brothers and sisters or parents remained Buddhists. Since American public schools usually do not give religious instruction, parents of Japanese ancestry were eager that their children have organized training in ethics, whether on a Buddhist or Christian doctrinal foundation.

Adaptability to other cultures and religions is a trait that Buddhism has shown since it spread from India through Asia to Japan and then to the United States. Just as it competed in Japan with Shintoism, so it competed

in the United States with Christianity to hold its members and gain converts. American Buddhist churches and Christian churches in Japanese American communities have adopted ideas and customs from each other as popular Shintoism and Buddhism did in Japan.

A new sect, which became popular among older people in California in the 1930's, is the Seicho-no-Iye. It combines Christianity and Buddhism around the faith that health and happiness can be attained by the proper mental attitude. The literature of the sect refers to both Gautama Buddha and Mary Baker Eddy. This sect is represented in the relocation centers by a negligible percentage.

The principal change which American Buddhists made under the influence of Christianity was to add to the original religious purpose of their church the functions of providing recreation and education for its younger members. The American Buddhist societies carrying out these functions were patterned after those in the Christian churches.

Buddhist children had Sunday Schools established for them, and in 1936 The Buddhist Mission of North America, the organization of the Nishi subsect of the Shin, had 6332 children enrolled in Sunday Schools. Young people had the Young Men's Buddhist Association and the Young Women's Buddhist Association, comparable in organization and function to the Young Men's Christian Association and the Young Women's Christian Association. In 1926 these associations united into the Young Buddhists Association, which was to become an important force after evacuation in reuniting both old and young Buddhists. Older Buddhist women had the Women's Buddhist Association, corresponding to the Ladies Aid, which sponsored church socials and bazaars with other church societies, fostered work in social service, and conducted study groups on domestic subjects.

Buddhist church calendars took over American and Christian holidays and adapted them to their congregations. Programs were held for Mother's Day and Father's Day. On Memorial Day, Buddhists held services at graveyards similar to Christian services. At some relocation centers, Buddhists and Christians have held joint Memorial Day services at the graves of those who have died since evacuation. On Christmas eve, Buddhists usually hold an "End of the Year" celebration with features taken from the Christian one, such as children receiving gifts and the Sunday School classes presenting plays. Besides these new holidays, the Buddhists observed some of their former holidays, such as, for example, the birthday of Buddha, (which comes at about Easter time), and Bon celebrations at which the dead are honored and the living exchange gifts.

Under the influence of Christianity, Buddhists modified several aspects of their religious activities. They adopted Sunday as a special day for religious observances, and took over the singing of hymns (and even adapted Christian hymns), choirs, choir robes, congregational responses, and the program arrangements followed in Christian churches. Most of the Buddhist buildings became known as churches instead of temples, the term temple being reserved for the principal structure in a diocese headquarters.

A function which Buddhists added to their American organization was the teaching of Japanese language and culture to the younger generation in schools conducted by priests or by laymen.

However, despite the many efforts of the Buddhist Church to attract children into their congregations, less than half of the Nisei have become members. Many Nisei, despite the language schools, do not know enough Japanese to follow the services led by priests so unfamiliar with English as to be unable to translate from Japanese for the benefit of the younger members of the congregation. Then too as the young people marry, they tend to withdraw from the church societies, thus breaking the social and recreational tie which had been stronger than the religious bond in holding them to the Buddhist Church.

Many Buddhists wished to accelerate the Americanization process in their church, but the change was gradual until Pearl Harbor. Then many changes came rapidly as a reaction to the hysteria which swept the West Coast. The Buddhist Mission of North America made up of Nishi members of the Shin sect changed its name to The Buddhist Mission of America and incorporated under the laws of California. The Mission urged its members to "Americanize your organizations and all its activities," and issued statements declaring, "United we stand for democracy." Services, especially for young people, were conducted in English. Members of the Mission were urged to buy bonds and to join the Red Cross and other patriotic organizations. Churches sponsored dances to raise money for patriotic purposes and gave parties for draftees.

Progressive Buddhists hailed this move, which had led young Buddhists to assume a more dominant role in the church. However, the Issei still retained actual control until the church organization collapsed upon the evacuation of the West Coast members and the internment of some of the Issei churchmen. After arrival in the relocation centers, the young Buddhists assumed control until the older generation recovered from the shock of evacuation. The younger members reestablished not only the church but the program of social activities which, in the United States, had become such an integral part of the Buddhist Church.

Those who had formerly attended both Christian and Buddhist services continued to do so in the centers, but the trend among some of them has been toward more complete identification with the Christian denominations due to the concentrated community life in the centers. Among others, the pull has been toward Buddhism for the sake of family solidarity.

The members of the Young Buddhist Association feel that if Buddhism is to continue to exist in this country the burden rests with them. In May, 1943, an inter-project meeting of members of the Association was held in Salt Lake City for the first time since evacuation. Although the local associations and the central organization have been able to maintain their existence, the members feel they are in a difficult position. Because of the war they hesitate to become too prominent and conspicuous. Many are being dispersed throughout the country into areas where there are no Buddhist churches. Four of the only six Nisei ministers of Buddhism are in the army; there is no American seminary to train lay Buddhist ministers. The Young Buddhists are divided among themselves. Some wish to cling to the sects of their parents and, though recognizing the need for change, do not want it to come quickly. Others wish to reject the remaining Japanese influence in the Buddhist church in the United States and establish an American Buddhist Church completely divorced from Japan. It is only in this way, they feel, that the present drift of young Buddhists to Christianity can be halted.