

The *Hsi-Nan* Chinese Buddhist Temple: Seeking to Americanize

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The first Chinese Buddhist temple in Houston was a house that was converted to a Chinese-style temple, the Buddha Temple. Although only a few miles from downtown, the area surrounding the temple was sparsely inhabited and marked by copious trees and bushes. There was no nearby public transportation. This secluded hermitage was an ideal location for a traditional Buddhist monastery. Ten years later, however, in 1980, the Chinese Buddhist Association built the *Hsi-Nan* Temple in southwestern Houston, an area where many Chinese had recently settled. The magnificent Chinese architecture of the new temple, with glazed tiles and upturned eaves, colored yellow and red, and with a lotus pond in front, is the largest Buddhist temple in the southern United States. What is more remarkable, however, is the symbolic transition between the Buddha Temple (BT) to the *Hsi-Nan* Temple (HNT): from seclusion from the world to involvement with society; from ritual-centered to sermon-centered services; from emphasizing life after death to paying greater attention to life in this world; from monk-centered to active lay leadership; and from traditionalism to innovative expansion. The *Hsi-Nan* Temple is seeking to modernize and Americanize Buddhism.

I. History & Membership Characteristics

In 1979, a Chinese monk from Taiwan, along with a half dozen Chinese immigrants, established the Chinese Buddhist Association in Houston. Before coming to Houston, this monk had lived at a Chinese Buddhist temple in New York for several years and tried, in vain, to start a temple both in Boston and in Washington, D.C. In Houston, he found enthusiastic support from Buddhist immigrants from Taiwan and Hong Kong and, with financial support from a monk in Hong Kong, bought a house with a big yard in south Houston. A year later, as the attendance grew to several dozen, the house was converted into the Buddha Temple. In 1980, another Chinese monk came from New York to join this group. He was born in China, grew up in Burma, and received a Chinese and Buddhist education in Taiwan. As attendance at the Buddha Temple grew, many members who lived in the western and southwestern parts of the city began to complain about the inconvenience of driving a long distance to the secluded Buddha Temple.

RELIGION AND THE NEW IMMIGRANTS

*Continuities and Adaptations in
Immigrant Congregations*

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and

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Walnut Creek • Lanham • New York • Oxford

2000

At this time, an area of southwestern Houston was becoming a Chinatown, a center for Chinese shopping malls, restaurants, banks, supermarkets, newspaper publishing offices, shops, community centers, and Chinese schools. Responding to the demands of Chinese members who lived in this area, the Buddha Temple rented a hall in a Chinese shopping mall in the area and opened it daily for individual devotion and for *dharma* lectures twice a month on Sundays. A lecture hall in the midst of market activities represented a major change, as well as an experiment for the monks, who traditionally live in secluded temples and wait for pilgrims to come for devotion and consultation. The storefront temple was a success as attendance steadily increased. The monks and lay leaders decided to make a permanent move and build a new temple in the center of the Chinese community—the *Hsi-Nan* Temple.

The *Hsi-Nan* Temple was completed and opened for weekly Sunday services and daily devotion in 1990. It originally consisted of the Grand Buddha Hall, the *Kuan Yin* Hall, living quarters for the monks and guests, a kitchen and dining room, a conference room, a library, and a classroom. Most construction materials were imported from Hong Kong. The construction cost over two million dollars, most of the money coming from donations by temple members, despite the depressed Houston economy in the late 1980s. The substantial donations marked the affluence of the temple's growing membership.

Inside the Grand Buddha Hall, the front altar follows Chinese tradition, with incense tables, chanting instruments such as drums and bells, and a huge jade statue of a sitting Buddha. Totally non-traditional, however, is a piano to the left of the altar and, more conspicuously, two columns of pews on the carpeted floor. Behind the Grand Buddha Hall is the smaller *Kuan Yin* Hall which is more traditional in many ways: There are no pews but rather cushions and low benches, along with ancestral tablets for receiving offerings and blessings.

After completing the two halls, HNT turned its attention to the needs of youth and, with money provided by a couple from Hong Kong, built a two-story Youth Education Center. The rented lecture hall in the Chinese mall was closed and the original Buddha Temple was converted into a Buddhist cemetery, a place for storing ash-boxes of HNT members and their families after cremation. The only HNT collective activity that is held at BT today is the *Qingming* Memorial Service in April, which is a time to commemorate deceased ancestors.

Since its beginning, the HNT has recruited members through lay member networks, by placing ads in the local Chinese newspaper, and by holding an annual bazaar in a Chinese shopping mall. Since 1990, HNT has created ministries in youth education by starting a Chinese weekend school, propagated Buddhism to Chinese immigrants through publications and festival celebrations, and recruited non-Chinese Americans. It has also organized a Buddhist Choir and initiated some charity programs. A lecture by the Dalai Lama at the temple in March 1991 attracted the first Caucasian, a Mormon who explored the temple after seeing a local T.V. program on the Dalai Lama's lecture. He is now the leader of the English-speaking group in the temple, which consists of converts from Baptist, Lutheran, and Jewish family backgrounds. In 1996, HNT began to initiate novice nuns and, within a year, three Chinese women had shaved their heads and moved into the living quarters of the *Hsi-Nan* Temple. HNT is also open to the initiation of monks, but so far no one has come forward.

The most complete mailing list of *Hsi-Nan*, as of May 1997, lists a total of 1,102 addresses, 740 of which are in the Greater Houston area. The rest are in other parts of Texas (18) or in other states (311). The nature of the mailing list makes it impossible to know the demographic characteristics of its members. What is clear is that most members are from Taiwan (probably 80%), a small number from Hong Kong (probably 10%), a few from Vietnam, and the rest from mainland China and other places. Most Taiwanese immigrants (about 70%) are native Taiwanese (*ben sheng ren*) and the rest are *wai sheng ren* (people of foreign provinces, either mainland-born or their children). Another distinct subgroup are Hakka people, who are usually not regarded as an ethnic group in China, but nevertheless are distinctive from other Chinese. I will explore the reasons for this membership configuration in a later section.

In the late 1990s, HNT continues to grow in membership and to expand its ministries. The most critical expansion is the English service for Anglos and American-born Chinese. If HNT can maintain this ministry, it will make a successful transition from an immigrant congregation to one of native-born Americans of diverse origins. The monks and lay leaders share a vision for such a transition; however, immigrant members may not be ready for it. The immigrants' children do not actively participate in religious activities, although their parents make a variety of efforts to bring them to the temple to learn Chinese language and cultural customs or for Buddhist classes combined with fun activities with Chinese peers.

Hsi-Nan Temple now also faces challenges to its continuing growth in membership and the expansion of its ministries. Several other Chinese Buddhist temples/organizations have been established in the last few years, including a branch of the International Buddhist Progress Society (IBPS), a branch of the Taiwan-based but internationalizing Buddhist Compassion Relief *Tzu-Chi* Foundation, and a branch of the rapidly growing international True Buddha Sect. *Hsi-Nan* recognizes the first two competitors as part of orthodox Buddhism but regards the third as a heretical cult. As the first Chinese Buddhist temple in Houston, and one with a magnificent building and a well-educated, harmonious religious leadership (*sangha*), *Hsi-Nan* has several strengths compared to its competitors. However, it is purely local, while the other three are branches of denomination-like Buddhist organizations and are, therefore, well financed by their headquarters and by temples in other locales. Competition pressures are forcing *Hsi-Nan* Temple to redefine its group identity and ministry strategies.

In addition, there are over 30 Chinese Protestant churches in Houston. These evangelical churches actively recruit Chinese immigrants from all parts of the world. In Taiwan, Buddhism is the dominant religion, but in the U.S., it is a minority religion among immigrants. Many Chinese Christians are converts from Buddhism and were actively proselytized. HNT, therefore, faces challenges from within the immigrant community while also seeking to be recognized by mainstream American society. Indeed, *Hsi-Nan* Temple appears to be doing better in its relationship with mainstream American society than with the ethnic Chinese community. It regularly participates in the Inter-Faith Council where it meets no hostility, but when the monks visit Chinese evangelical churches, they are treated as "devils," according to one of the monks I interviewed. The effort by HNT to recruit Americans is perhaps partially a response to the hostility Buddhism faces from Chinese Christians.

II. Theology & Ritual

The Buddhism of *Hsi-Nan* is a reformed one, although members do not use the label "reformed Buddhism." They trace their doctrinal emphases to Rev. Tai-Xu (1889–1947) in the early decades of the twentieth century. He is considered by his followers as the "Martin Luther of modern Chinese Buddhism." After a tour in 1928 to Western Europe, the U.S., and Japan, Tai-Xu vigorously championed the reform of the *Sangha* system of Chinese Buddhism, to reorient Buddhism from a focus on death-rituals to an emphasis on well-being for the living. He coined the phrase *ren jian fo jiao* ("Buddhism in the human world" or "human Buddhism"). Tai-Xu believed that Buddhism was superior to Christianity in self-cultivation but inferior in social services and organization. Learning from the Christian seminary system of training clergy, he created Buddhist schools to train monks; learning from missionary hospitals, he tried to sponsor hospitals as a way of getting involved in society; following Christian footsteps, he mobilized young monks to visit and convert prisoners; imitating Christian weddings, he invented a Buddhist wedding ceremony. Tai-Xu also proclaimed that Buddhism stands in no contradiction to science. Since the 1960s, *ren jian* Buddhism has grown in Taiwan and become the mainstream of Chinese Buddhism and, since the 1970s, it has spread to other parts of the world. *Hsi-Nan* is one local temple within this stream. It has put the ideas of "human Buddhism" into practice and experimented with various organizational and ritual forms.

It is evident that the *Hsi-Nan* Temple has adopted many Christian practices that are nontraditional to Chinese Buddhism. As mentioned earlier, the Grand Buddha Hall has wooden pews for sitting with feet on the floor rather than cushions for sitting cross-legged; a monk preaches on Sundays rather than merely conducting ritual chanting of mantras and recitation of sutras; Sunday services often include a choir singing Western music accompanied by piano, rather than the monotonous *fan bei* chanting that aims at calming the mind and suppressing feelings. Organizationally, HNT has tried to implement a membership system. Socially, it has made efforts to provide charity and social services. Religiously, HNT has been active in proselytization. Equipped with his English language capability, one monk participates in the activities of the Inter-Faith Council of Houston and observes Christian services. During a Sunday service in the Grand Buddha Hall, he reported on his recent visit to a Catholic church. He said that he was really impressed by the hymnal singing and responsive reading done in various standing and sitting postures. He saw these as positive ways to engage the congregation, better than the traditional (and present) Buddhist way in which people sit on the floor (in the pew) for the entire hour or two of the service. "We should try it," he said, "it may help to make the sutra exposition more effectively communicated to the congregation." Through participation in Inter-Faith Council activities, HNT has also learned from Christian churches how to do charity work, such as collecting canned food and clothes for the homeless, providing scholarships for the children of poor families, and visiting hospitals and hospices.

Hsi-Nan also emphasizes the importance of returning to primitive Buddhism. A group of core members have been studying the sutra of *za a han jing*, the last sutra the Buddha taught before his *nirvana* and one that is not very popular in Chinese Buddhism. Through study of this sutra, the monks and lay teachers try to show that "human Buddhism" is really orthodox Buddhism. The central message of this sutra is, according to the monks,

"Be detached from the world, but go into the world to enlighten all living beings." During Sunday services, as well as on other occasions, the monks also re-interpret the history of Buddhism in China, pointing out that Buddhism was not always a hermit religion. Rather, according to *Hsi-Nan* Buddhists, these passive and secluded features of Chinese Buddhism were products of feudalism and do not reflect the essential nature of the religion. They see modernization as a liberating process that opens up new opportunities for Buddhist proselytization.

Another aspect of Buddhist reform is to focus more on living people, as exemplified in the reformation of the death ritual. Monks, along with lay leaders, visit seriously ill patients in the hospital before death, comfort them with words, and recite sutras and mantras to bless them. Immediately following death, the monks and lay believers chant and recite certain sutras to expiate the sins of the deceased and to wish them heaven (the Western Blissful World) or reincarnation into a happy life. However, the ritual has been shortened to a few hours in the hospital and again in the funeral home, rather than the traditional whole-day, three-day, or seven-day funeral. These rituals of visiting, chanting, and reciting sutras are all voluntary and free, although the family may want to donate money to the monks or the temple. HNT has also conducted several Buddhist weddings and the monks even go to members' homes to bless a newborn baby. All of these practices are innovative.

Hsi-Nan Temple has reduced the frequency of traditional Buddhist rituals, such as repetitious chanting and reciting sutras. Only once every month or two does the temple organize a whole-day or three-day confession ritual or meditation class. On most Sundays *Hsi-Nan* Temple holds two main services, the Chinese service and the English service, which are very different in content and format. The Chinese service has more mantra chanting, sutra recitation and exposition, and rituals, while the English service merely focuses on meditation and interactive discussion of Buddhist teachings. The usual course of the Chinese Sunday service begins with the congregation bowing to the Buddha and the monks, followed by brief chanting/singing, and then the congregation sits and listens to the monk deliver a sermon. Sitting cross-legged on a cushion on the altar, the monk reads a paragraph of a sutra and then explains it, continuing in this fashion for an hour, after which another monk does likewise for an hour. The service is conducted in Mandarin. An overhead projector beams a summary outline of the talk onto a screen. Following the two-hour service is an all-vegetarian lunch. Every member is welcome to buy a small or large plate of delicious food for two or three dollars, respectively. On special festival occasions lunch is served free of charge.

There is also a class on basic Buddhism in the morning, a mantra chanting ritual in the afternoon, and a sutra study group yet later. Rituals are especially favored by older people, but young people and inquirers are more interested in sutra study and in discussing Buddhist teachings, as well as in meditation. For those who want more involvement, the temple periodically offers one-, three-, and seven-day retreats that concentrate on chanting and meditation. In general, HNT has increased the emphasis on the study of Buddhist doctrine and meditation over chanting rituals. Also, it is preparing to establish a city-wide Buddhist school to systematically teach Buddhist sutras, philosophy, and meditation skills.

Reformed Buddhism, as practiced at HNT, is religiously fundamentalist, with emphasis placed on differentiating Buddhism from other religions. It opposes folk religious practices, such as worshipping non-Buddhist deities, and *fengshui*, *qigong*. Also, following

Chinese Buddhist traditions, HNT insists on complete vegetarianism, non-smoking, daily meditation, self-controlled sexuality for lay believers, and complete celibacy for monks and nuns.

Reformed Buddhism also stresses proselytizing. In order to spread Buddhism, its adherents are willing to adapt to the American environment. The most important change was building *Hsi-Nan* Temple in the middle of the Chinese community, symbolizing Buddhism in the human world rather than in seclusion. Adaptation to the American context is not seen as a problem for Chinese Buddhists, who have a history of religious adaptation to the Chinese environment by a religion that originated in South Asia. As one monk put it, "nothing is eternal or permanent, except the *dharma*. Human life is impermanence. Change is the law. Not only will *Hsi-Nan* change, some day it will disappear from the world. We Buddhists must see change with an immovable heart and a peaceful mind."

Monks and lay leaders sometimes say that Buddhism is not a religion. People of any religious background can come to learn about Buddhism and they do not have to give up their religion. However, when one wants to become a real Buddhist through the ritual of "taking refuge," one is required to be exclusively Buddhist. During the ritual the person is asked to take vows before receiving a certificate that is similar to the baptism record in a Christian church. However, there is a very interesting difference between the Chinese and English versions of the vows printed on the certificate. The Chinese version is clearly exclusionary but the English version waters down this requirement significantly. The English version of the vows reads:

I, _____, sincerely request the Dharma Teacher _____ to be witness as I take refuge in the Triple Jewels today. Given the name _____, I now begin a new way of life, relying upon the Buddha's teachings of Proper Understanding, Purity, Equality, and Compassion to cultivate the complete wisdom and true happiness of Original Nature. I take refuge in the Buddha, the one who shows me the way in this life. *Namo Buddhaya*. I take refuge in the *Dharma*, the way of understanding and love. *Namo Buddhaya*. I take refuge in the *Sangha*, the community that lives in harmony and awareness. *Namo Sanghaya*.

The Chinese version, translated literally, reads:

Today, the believer _____ (name), born in the year of _____, being received out of compassion by the venerable monk _____ of *Hsi-Nan* Temple of Houston, U.S.A., voluntarily will to take refuge in the three jewels, is given the *Dharma* name _____. From now on, I will forever protect and uphold the Buddhist religion and do all good. Forever take refuge in the Buddha, never take refuge in other gods. Forever take refuge in the *Dharma*, never take refuge in other religions and scriptures. Forever take refuge in the *Sangha*, never take refuge in other heretical communities or other religions.

It appears that in its desire to recruit native Americans, HNT allows them more flexibility in their beliefs and commitments than it does native Chinese.

Given that *Hsi-Nan* Temple is heavily comprised of engineers and computer specialists, it is not surprising that modern technologies are widely employed at the temple. In the mid-1980s, when Chinese word processing was still in its infancy, one HNT monk

began to learn and master it. In 1990 he took over editing the temple magazine in order to apply his new skills. Audio and video tape recording have been widely used to reproduce lectures and rituals for future use. The temple also uses an overhead projector during Sunday services. Recently, it started its own World Wide Web page and temple members also use e-mail a lot to communicate with each other. A most interesting innovation is the electronic chanting machine. It is like a walkman, about two-thirds the size of a palm, and operates with two AA batteries or through an AC adapter. It is neither a radio nor a recorder, but rather a device to continually repeat the chanting of the mantra—*namo emitofa*. The instructions for the device say that it can help to create a Buddhist environment in one's home or office, in a temple, or anywhere one goes. It also helps one to concentrate on meditative devotion to the Buddha. This device was invented and produced in Hong Kong and is widely distributed in the U.S.

III. Temple Structure

Hsi-Nan Temple is an independent local temple without affiliation to any higher body, but it does associate informally with other Buddhist organizations/associations in the U.S. and in Taiwan, and it participates in the Inter-Faith Council of Houston. Decision-making is not democratic at *Hsi-Nan*. The monks maintain authority and are well respected, although they are willing to hear the opinions of active members. The temple has undergone changes in its organizational structure; however, they do not depart very far from Buddhist tradition.

Traditionally, Chinese Buddhism does not have a membership structure for lay believers. It is *sangha*-centered, a term that refers to the monks and nuns who reside at a temple. A few wealthy lay Buddhists may be patrons of a temple, and lay Buddhists can be especially devoted to a particular temple. However, the majority of lay Buddhists do not "join" a temple. They visit for festivals, or regularly on the first and fifteenth days of the month, or for special needs such as praying for a sick family member or to get pregnant, or for seeking consultation with monks on their personal fortune. However, they often visit more than one temple.

In modern times, however, Chinese Buddhism has been undergoing significant changes in both doctrinal emphases and organizational structure. One of the reforms is focused on the congregational model. In 1981, the temple developed a system of registering temple participants as members, using a bi-monthly newsletter as a mechanism to create congregational community. To join HNT one need only pay membership dues of \$10 a year. In return, HNT mails to members the bi-monthly newsletter, now a well-published magazine, along with announcements and notices. A mailing list membership is a giant step in Buddhist reform; however, it also poses some problems. First, to be a mailing list member requires only the nominal dues requirement; there is no requirement that one be a Buddhist and no formal rules for excluding anyone. Second, membership is not based on individuals but rather on households. Therefore, the number of subscriptions to the temple magazine cannot be easily translated into the actual number of adherents. This is an indication of the fact that being Buddhist is not necessarily a conscious decision made by individuals but rather a family tradition. Some family members whose household is registered with HNT may

practice non-Buddhist religions, such as Taoism, folk religion, or even some form of Christianity. In fact, I met a man at the temple whose wife is a Christian. He used to go to church with his wife but recently he switched to this temple. Another problem is that the rights of members are not clearly defined, such as ownership of HNT property and participation in congregational decision-making. Nominal members could voice strong opinions concerning temple issues, thereby becoming disruptive to it. To solve this problem, in the early 1990s HNT enhanced its organizational structure by adopting a new level of membership apart from the mailing list membership.

The temple continues the mailing list membership, but nominal members do not have rights of ownership and voting. From among the paying members, the monks choose a core of committed Buddhists and active participants in temple services and ministries. These members are given the honorable title *hu fa wei yuan* (Dharma Guardians) and comprise the voting members. Through voting they participate in temple decision-making and elect trustees to form the Trustees Board. The minimum requirement for becoming a Dharma Guardian is two years of paying membership. Another requirement is that one has to have taken refuge with the three jewels (Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha), which is broadly comparable to baptism for Christians. Taking refuge is done with a particular monk, which entails becoming a disciple of that monk, and often subsequent monks in subsequent refuges. At *Hsi-Nan*, it is the monks who select Dharma Guardians from among the ordinary members who have taken refuge in the three jewels, although the selection needs to be approved by the Trustee Board.

After two years as a Dharma Guardian, one becomes eligible to be elected as a trustee. Currently there are 27 trustees. Each trustee has a three-year tenure and each year one-third of the trustees step down to be replaced by newly elected ones. However, trustees can be re-elected without term limits. After two years as a trustee, one becomes eligible to become an executive trustee. The term of executive trustee is three years, again with no term limit. The three monks are permanent trustees and automatic members of the Executive Trustees Board.

Among the Dharma Guardians there are more women (97) than men (53). Most members are professionals, especially engineers, and a few are business people. Ethnically, 69 are native Taiwanese, 60 *wai sheng ren* from Taiwan, twelve Hong Kong immigrants, six Hakka, three from Southeast Asia, and no one from mainland China. The first group of Dharma Guardians was selected in 1992 and, in 1997, the first non-Chinese member was selected, a white man who converted from Mormonism. Among the 27 lay trustees in 1994, 13 were men and 14 women. In those families where both husband and wife are active participants in the temple, it is typically the husband who is selected as a trustee. Most trustees are from Taiwan, although four are from Hong Kong. Most are engineers, though seven are in business. The youngest is 39 years old and the oldest in his eighties. Among the 1997 executive trustees, four are *Sangha* members (three monks and one nun) and six are lay people—four men and two women.

This organizational system—mailing list members, Dharma Guardians, trustees, executive trustees, and permanent trustees—is very clearly defined and undemocratic. The monks have the highest authority and their opinions are taken seriously, if not always followed, in recommending candidates for executive trustees, trustees, and Dharma Guardians. This structure protects the continuity and stability of the temple, inasmuch as it seems

that only the monks can initiate changes. This kind of structure also minimizes potential conflicts within the *sangha*. Without the approval of existing monks, no new monk or nun can be accepted into the temple. In addition, it minimizes potential conflicts within the Executive Trustees Board because only those who follow the monks closely will be selected/elected to the board, and if an executive trustee dissents, he or she can be removed by the monks. The larger Trustees Board may be a less homogeneous group, composed of people with varied backgrounds and opinions; however, it has very limited power. It serves as a rubber-stamp committee, approving what the Executive Trustees Board recommends and discussing how to support and implement the ministries designed by the monks. The control of the monks also extends to Dharma Guardians. Each year only a small number of ordinary members are selected to become Dharma Guardians, which is an honorary title, and because they are selected by the monks, they are grateful to them. Therefore, this reformed structure of the Buddhist temple still shows strong traditional traces of the personal cult of the monk. Personal attachment and loyalty to the master-teacher remains the norm.

IV. Social Services & Community Relations

In general, the temple provides few social services. The only meaningful social services are the education fund to assist college students of relatively poor families and the Chinese School. The temple awards several fellowships/scholarships every year to college students who are children of temple members and are nominated by two other active members. The Chinese School is open to children of both temple members and non-members who are willing to pay tuition. Children from grade school to high school may register for language classes, Chinese cultural classes (dancing, singing, etc.), and martial arts classes. Most of the students are children of temple members who want to provide a place for their children to go while they attend Sunday services. They also want their children to learn Chinese language and culture in a specifically Buddhist environment. The school is further seen as a means of attracting non-Buddhist Chinese families to the temple.

The other social services are mostly designed for public relations purposes. For example, responding to potential neighborhood hostility, when the temple opened, neighbors were invited to come visit and partake of vegetarian food. After this, the temple collected money and donated stationery to the neighborhood grade school. Upon receiving the donation, the school invited the monks to come and explain Buddhism during its multicultural month. Another example is collecting canned food and clothes for the homeless, an initiative that came from the Inter-Faith Council of Houston. However, these kinds of social services are not really integral parts of the *Hsi-Nan* ministry, and the people who are in charge of these services are not otherwise very active or vocal in temple affairs.

Hsi-Nan Temple also provides emergency assistance. For example, a Taiwanese student attending a local university got into a bad car accident and was seriously burned. Upon learning about this, the Taiwan Office of Economic and Cultural Exchange called *Hsi-Nan* and some Chinese Christian churches. While the man was in the hospital for treatment and cosmetic surgery, both church and temple people visited him. While they all tried to comfort, as well as convert him, eventually the young man became a Buddhist,

from gods. They are not following orthodox Buddhism." Peaceful coexistence best describes the relationship between *Hsi-Nan* and this Chinese folk temple.

The Chinese Catholic Church is only a few blocks away from *Hsi-Nan*. According to the *Hsi-Nan* monks, the Chinese Catholic priest used to visit their temple frequently and they shared good conversation and maintained a friendly relationship. However, the monks have had bitter experiences with Chinese Protestant churches. The Abbot said that a long time ago *Hsi-Nan* monks visited some Chinese Protestant churches in order to better understand and learn from them, "but they treated us as devils." Chinese Protestant churches and parareligious organizations in Houston often hold workshops or give lectures to critically examine Buddhist beliefs and practices. HNT people told me that once a Chinese Protestant pastor came to the *Hsi-Nan* Temple library to borrow books. Eventually realizing that this pastor was trying to learn Buddhism in order to better defeat it and attract Chinese to Christianity, the leaders stopped allowing him access to the library. In the library I found several books by famous Chinese Buddhist monks which attacked Christianity, so clearly the animosity is mutual.

The monks are aware of the fact that some *Hsi-Nan* members used to visit Christian churches and say that it is understandable that these immigrants sought fellowship with other Chinese in a religious setting. One *Hsi-Nan* nun admitted that she used to visit a church often and even had a Bible study group at her home. She now feels that Christianity, unlike Buddhism, is not a religion of the Chinese: "Buddhism has been a Chinese religion. I guess something in Buddhism is dear to our Chinese minds." She used to own a very profitable restaurant. After her conversion to Buddhism, she felt that the restaurant was doing evil by killing and cooking living beings, so she closed her business, divorced her husband, and became a nun.

HNT maintains a close relationship with the Taiwan Office of Economic and Cultural Exchange, the official representative of the ROC government in Taiwan. The temple has no contacts with the Houston Consulate of the mainland Chinese (PRC) government. The temple also tries to develop ties with the city, county, and state governments for public relations purposes. When they completed the temple in 1990, government officials were invited to join the dedication ceremony, and many accepted. During the ceremony, the Houston mayor, in conjunction with two members of the City Council, proclaimed that day "Houston Buddhist Day." A local Texas state senator also proclaimed it, on behalf of the governor, "Texas Buddhist Day." The mayor, on behalf of the U.S. government, awarded honorary citizen and goodwill ambassador certificates to the Abbot, a monk, and a founding lay member, in recognition of their contributions to the Houston community. The Managing Director of the largest daily newspaper in Houston congratulated the temple by publishing a story about *Hsi-Nan* Temple and awarding a whole page of the Religion Section to the temple dedication.

V. Ethnicity & Identity

Hsi-Nan is a counter-example to the dominant pattern of immigrant congregations in that it has opened itself to receiving non-immigrant, white Americans. To the larger American society, Chinese immigrant Buddhists are newcomers or guests. To this temple, however,

white American inquirers and converts are the guests or newcomers. The integration efforts of the temple are mostly directed to integrating non-Chinese Americans. Nonetheless, within the Chinese community there are diverse social and cultural groups and the integration of Chinese subgroups is not necessarily easier than the integration of non-Chinese Americans.

The membership of HNT is dominated by Taiwanese immigrants with only a few Hong Kong and Vietnamese immigrants and almost none from the mainland. Why is this the case? First of all, a revival of Buddhism, beginning in the 1960s, made the religion increasingly influential in Taiwan, where it superceded folk practices to become the largest faith. When Taiwanese immigrants come to the U.S., they seek religious sites to meet their spiritual needs. Some HNT members whom I interviewed said that they once attended Chinese Protestant churches seeking a religious atmosphere and an ethnic environment. Attending a Christian church is not totally unacceptable to many Buddhists because of their inclusive view of religion. However, when they learned of the existence of a Chinese Buddhist monk and temple in town, they switched back to their original faith. Therefore, the coming of a monk and the establishment of a temple made it possible for immigrant Chinese Buddhists to gather again as Buddhists and to renew and revive their religious practices. Second, this temple has close relationships with the Taiwan Office of Economic and Cultural Exchange, which functions as a Houston consulate. This close relationship reflects the dominance of Taiwanese immigrants in the temple, but it also strengthens its identification with Taiwan. During festival celebrations the temple always has the highest official of the Taiwan Office give a speech during the service. The Taiwan Office also refers immigrants in need to the temple. Therefore, the close relationship with Taiwanese government representatives has drawn Taiwan immigrants to the temple, but it simultaneously alienates people from mainland China.

Hong Kong immigrants are few in number in *Hsi-Nan* Temple. This is probably a reflection of several things. First, there are not many Hong Kong immigrants in the Houston area. Second, Christianity made significant inroads in Hong Kong, backed by the colonial British government and a policy of religious freedom. The third reason for the lack of Hong Kong immigrants in HNT concerns language differences; Hong Kong is Cantonese speaking. The branch temple of the International Buddhist Progress Society has attracted a substantial number of Cantonese-speaking people. One of its nuns speaks Cantonese and I have seen IBPS flyers for Cantonese Dharma classes. In comparison, *Hsi-Nan* Temple has no Cantonese service, although one monk can speak it. HNT once experimented with holding a Cantonese Dharma class and translating the Sunday service sermon from Mandarin to Cantonese. However, because of the lack of participants, the practice was terminated. Many Cantonese-speaking Hong Kong immigrants are able to understand and communicate in Mandarin, which is the national language of both Taiwan and the People's Republic of China. Nonetheless, they are probably more comfortable in a temple with more Cantonese speakers.

There are no mainland Chinese immigrants who are voting members of HNT at this time, although some have attended the temple, mostly during important festival gatherings. Buddhism has had little influence in the People's Republic of China during the last four or five decades under Communist rule. Mainland immigrants in the U.S. show little interest in Buddhism, but many have become Christian. HNT people view this

phenomenon with puzzlement. A monk recalled that once he rescued a woman from mainland China who was abused by her husband. She lived in the temple for a couple of days while she psychologically recovered from a suicide attempt. However, after she left the temple she never came back again. During my fieldwork, I heard many lay leaders, as well as monks, puzzle over the reluctance of mainland immigrants to become involved in the temple. The monks are earnest in trying to attract them, as reflected in their attention to me—a mainland Chinese. I began my fieldwork with quiet visits to the temple without declaring my role as a researcher. During my third visit, after a service I was approached by a monk who must have seen me as a new face. In answer to his question, I told him my background; that I came from mainland China, got my Ph.D. in sociology and am now a post-doctoral fellow at the University of Houston. I briefly described the research project and asked to interview him. He agreed without hesitation. Although there may have been many reasons for his willingness to talk with me, I suspect that one of them was his intention to attract mainland Chinese to the temple. Later, when I brought the consent form to get the Abbot's signature, we had a brief conversation. He seemed happy to see a mainland Chinese, for he himself was born there. I was accepted as an insider, or partial insider, immediately. That was in sharp contrast with my experiences at Chinese Christian churches, where they often asked me questions about my religious beliefs and clearly expressed doubts about my purpose in doing research, which happened precisely because I am from mainland China.

The sense of puzzlement about why mainland Chinese refuse to join their temple is well expressed by the General Executive, the highest lay leader:

Can you explain why mainland Chinese hesitate to talk with us? I have seen some visitors to the temple. When I welcomed them, they were very reserved; [it] seemed like they were telling me "leave me alone." Can you tell me how we should talk with them?

His impression of the unapproachability of mainland Chinese is shared by other lay leaders. If they do not initiate conversation, mainland Chinese do not talk. When temple members initiate a warm welcome, mainland Chinese withdraw. I think there are two problems. First, there are cultural differences between Taiwanese and mainland Chinese. Because most HNT people have had few substantial contacts with mainland Chinese, they do not know the subtle and sensitive differences. Although both speak Mandarin, vocabularies and linguistic tastes differ. Mainland Chinese can be turned off by a single word or sentence spoken by a Taiwanese. However, there is a second, more significant problem, namely, the close relationship between HNT and the Taiwanese government. Although many mainland Chinese dislike their own government, they do not have good impressions of the Taiwanese government, especially because of the Kuomintang's (ruling party) unclear stand toward unification with mainland China. To attract mainland Chinese, the religious institution has to become apolitical and cut its ties with any Chinese government. One of the reasons why many mainland Chinese have joined Christian churches is because they often take no stand on Chinese politics. Many Chinese Christian churches have clearly redefined their Chinese identity, moving away from political identification with any Chinese government while strengthening identification with "Cultural China." Without similar changes, I predict that *Hsi-Nan* will not be able to attract many mainland Chinese.

While unable to attract mainland Chinese, the temple has been moderately successful in attracting non-Chinese participants. At the English service each Sunday, more than half of the 20 to 30 participants are Caucasians. There are also some South Asians (from Sri Lanka and India), Southeast Asians (from Burma, Thailand, and Vietnam), African Americans, and a number of English-speaking Chinese. The monks and lay leaders share a consensus that they should pay more attention to, and provide more resources for, the English ministry, in part by encouraging lay leaders to assume more responsibility in Chinese ministries, thus freeing the English-speaking monk to devote more attention to the English ministry. That monk has also asked the most capable lay leaders who can speak English to work with him to expand the English service. Two former General Executives now are leaders of the English ministry. The English Sunday service is held at the smaller *Kuan Yin* hall, although the leaders told me that they envisioned a shift in the future by which it would be held in the larger hall while the Chinese service would be moved to the smaller one. They foresee the day when the English ministry will supersede the Chinese ministry. In preparation, the Trustees Board recently came up with a plan to add English signs to the existing Chinese ones on the doors of the temple. The Board also decided to find proper English names for all ministry divisions and leadership positions so that non-Chinese members can have a better understanding of the temple structure.

Today, the Chinese and English services are quite separate and interactions between the two groups are uncommon. However, temple leaders have been trying to integrate them. They encourage Chinese professionals who can speak English to greet and chat with non-Chinese Americans, and they encourage Chinese immigrants who cannot speak English to smile at the Americans. Sometimes at lunch, white Americans are pushed ahead without having to stand in line. During festival celebration services they arrange for white Americans to give speeches. They also try to engage white Americans by asking them to take part in cooking the Sunday lunch, in cleaning the temple yard, and in planning activities. In May 1997, when the temple was preparing for the celebration of Buddha's birthday, the temple mobilized white Americans to actively participate in the festival service by giving speeches, beating the drum, and ringing the bell in the Grand Buddha Hall. Several of them got very excited about the opportunity and enthusiastically participated in the training process. Festival services also have English translations. In the spring of 1997, a white American man asked to start a weekday evening English class to systematically learn Buddhist teachings and practices. The leadership liked the idea and encouraged him to organize it. Also in 1997, HNT selected the first non-Chinese as a Dharma Guardian. Overall, the 20 to 30 non-Chinese Americans have been treated with special care.

Ironically, not all Americans who attend the temple want to be integrated with the Chinese. Some come not because they believe in Buddhism or seek fellowship with others, but just for a meditation session in a religious atmosphere. The first part of each Sunday English service is an hour and a half of meditation, at which attendance is often larger than at the subsequent hour and a half discussion session. During a round of self-introductions following a meditation session, a white man in his forties said that "this temple is wonderful. The most wonderful thing for me is that I can come to meditate here in such a wonderful atmosphere where I can be absolutely solitary while in a crowd." He attended no group discussion sessions.

Generally speaking, intra and inter-ethnic relations have been harmonious and at the temple people act respectfully toward one another. All of those whom I interviewed said that there have been no quarrels or open conflicts among the groups, although individual disagreements are common. The monks have been careful to promote harmonious relationships and avoid conflicts. One strategy to avoid intra-ethnic conflicts is to avoid talking about politics. In Taiwan, people are divided on the issue of unification with mainland China and the four Taiwanese political parties represent a wide spectrum of opinion in regard to this emotional issue. In my interviews, many expressed pro-unification positions but they all said that they did not discuss the issue in the temple or during temple gatherings. Another factor behind the lack of intra-ethnic tension and conflict is the relative homogeneity of temple membership resulting from membership selectivity. Through tight control over entry into the Dharma Guardians, the temple has selected only those who cherish the same ideals and follow the same principles. The temple leadership does not see itself as an ethnic religious institution that has to open its doors to all Chinese, or even all Chinese Buddhists. Those who cannot find a good fit in the temple do not stay, nor are they invited to stay. Inter-ethnic relationships are harmonious because both leaders and core members have achieved a consensus that in order for Buddhism to survive and expand in America, it is necessary to bring non-Chinese Americans into the temple, which, in turn, will help Buddhism enter mainstream American society. Most Chinese members are middle-class professionals or business people, as are the white Americans who attend the temple. Chinese members see themselves as hosts to non-Chinese participants who, in turn, see themselves as guests being treated honorably.

Chinese identity for *Hsi-Nan* members is secure so they emphasize their religious identity, as exemplified by their attempts to unite with non-Chinese Buddhists and to convert non-Chinese Americans. They understand that Chinese Buddhism is different from other Buddhist traditions; however, they also see that orthodox Buddhism can be found in these traditions as well. Tibetan, Japanese Zen, and Theravada Buddhism have all made progress in spreading to North America and now Chinese Buddhists feel that they must work to introduce their form of Buddhism to Americans as well.

VI. Incorporating Newcomers

HNT is an immigrant religious organization. It has a history of less than twenty years and most members are new immigrants. However, it is a religious organization with an almost exclusive focus on religious services. It does not have systematic programs or an organizational infrastructure to assist new immigrants in their adjustment to American society. However, the temple is no longer a secluded place for pilgrims and personal devotions but has become an ethnic community, a place where it is natural for members to informally help each other in various ways, including information exchange and emergency assistance. For example, people provide job or housing information to those in need of them. When a couple opened a family business, a tea shop, the monks and fellow believers went to congratulate him and showed their support by purchasing tea.

One of the reasons for the lack of social services to new immigrants is that there are many ethnic Chinese organizations and associations that already provide services, such as

teaching English to new immigrants or providing job referrals for a fee. These service organizations are easily accessible, their phone numbers and locations listed in the Chinese Yellow Pages of Houston. There are same-province associations, alumni associations, and entertainment and sports clubs. Chinese people are not used to relying on a religious organization for mundane needs. During interviews, many members said that Chinese immigrants in need would first solicit assistance from family members, relatives, and friends. Only in an emergency situation, when help from family members and relatives is exhausted, would an immigrant seek assistance from a temple. Also, many temple members came to Houston as professionals after graduation from an American university, or are business people who brought investment capital to Houston. These professional and business people moved to Houston because they found employment or opportunities to open a business. They do not need job referrals or housing assistance from a religious organization. They can afford to hire agents for such needs if necessary.

VII. Social Activities

The most frequent, regular social activity is the vegetarian lunch every Sunday. The Ministry Board has a food group which is responsible for recruiting volunteers to cook and serve food and make related arrangements. A majority of kitchen volunteers are middle-aged and older women. They cut vegetables and serve. However, major cooks are often middle-aged men. The women and men say that it requires physical strength to stir-fry large amounts of vegetables; thus men should do it. Sometimes some white Americans volunteer to help with cooking and they also participate in cleaning up afterward, which is a means of getting them involved in temple activities. On special occasions, such as large festivals, the temple provides a free lunch to everyone as a means of attracting and welcoming new people. Lunch with others creates a relaxed and familial atmosphere in which it becomes easier to talk with newcomers. Sharing food is characteristic of all Chinese gatherings and the temple is no exception.

Besides Buddhist festivals, *Hsi-Nan* also celebrates traditional, secular Chinese festivals, especially the Chinese New Year. The Chinese New Year's Day sermon in 1997 ended with the distribution of red envelopes containing a dollar bill to every participant. The giving of red envelopes containing money is a traditional Chinese folk practice, symbolizing the wish for good luck and financial success in the new year. The celebration of Chinese New Year also includes folk performances, such as Chinese dancing, singing, and martial arts. The New Year's celebration extends to the Lantern Festival on the fifteenth day of the first month of the Chinese calendar, when *Hsi-Nan* Temple and its Chinese School sponsor a one-day entertainment fair in the temple yard, which includes various games for children so that they can get a taste of the traditional Chinese New Year's celebration.

Every month the temple organizes a group activity that includes both religious and social elements. Releasing living beings (*fang sheng*) is a Buddhist ritual to express compassion for all living things. This religious ritual is combined with an excursion for fun. On the third Saturday of every month, people gather at the lotus pond in the temple yard. After chanting mantras and reciting sutras there, they drive to a Galveston beach to release crabs into the sea that had been purchased from a seafood market. After this is done, they have a picnic and play games on the beach or in a nearby park.

Hsi-Nan also has an annual bazaar. Its original purpose was to raise funds for the general operation of the temple. Now it has become an occasion to reach out to new Chinese immigrants. Temple members donate small articles or big pieces of furniture and cook vegetarian food for sale in the parking lot of a mall. All money goes to the temple.

VIII. Transnational Relations

Transnational ties across the Pacific are mostly non-organizational, personal, and informal. Unlike IBPS and other Chinese Buddhist branches in Houston, *Hsi-Nan* is an independent local temple which, therefore, has no formal organizational transnational ties. However, this is not to say that there are no connections, exchanges, or mutual influences between this temple and overseas Chinese communities. There would have been no HNT without financial support from a Hong Kong monk who was the Abbot for many years, although he did not permanently reside in Houston and only made occasional short visits. When the founding monk was seriously ill, he went back to Taiwan to get medical treatment, and from 1987 to 1992, he was given the title of Abbot of a temple in Taiwan. His obligation as its Abbot was to visit the temple twice annually. However, that tie was a personal one between the monk and some individuals in the Taiwan temple, rather than between *Hsi-Nan* and that temple.

Videotapes of talks, rituals, and services are easy to transmit abroad. HNT has been diligent in tape-recording every talk by a monk and in making videotapes of festivals and special services. These audio- and videotapes are stored in the library and are free for members to borrow. Some members make copies of their favorite tapes and send them back to Taiwan. Some videotapes by Chinese Buddhist monks in the U.S. are even circulating in mainland China.

Another example of transnational ties concerns the Hong Kong immigrant couple who helped found HNT and has been a major donor to it. They have established foundations in Taiwan, Thailand, and mainland China to promote Buddhism. They also give scholarships and donations to Buddhist novices and temples in China, and to university students there. They do these things because they want to contribute to Buddhist development and cultural reconstruction in China, where religious activities are restricted and tightly controlled by the government. China has welcomed such donations as an aid to education rather than to religion. However, through donating scholarships, this Hong Kong couple has been able to meet with university leaders and students, during which time they have an opportunity to talk about Buddhism.

The existence of a magnificently built Chinese Buddhist temple in Houston conveys a message to people in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and mainland China. They think that if Westerners value and accept Buddhism, why should we Chinese give it up? The existence of such a temple in the southern U.S. is news brought back to Asia by temple members and by Chinese news media. During the New Year's celebration at *Hsi-Nan* Temple, a TV newswoman reported the services to an audience in Taiwan. At *Hsi-Nan* I also picked up various newsletters published by Buddhist temples in Taiwan. The temple library subscribes to almost all Chinese Buddhist magazines and newsletters put out in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and North America. In short, this local, independent temple is not at all isolated from Chinese and other Buddhists in other parts of the world.

IX. The Role of Women

Hsi-Nan Temple has three monks who became monks somewhere other than in Houston and, since 1996, the temple has accepted three nun novices. These three women have all been middle-aged and immigrants from Taiwan. One was married and had children and the other two had never married. Today, temple authority still rests in the hands of the original two monks, one of whom serves as Abbot but recently declared that this would be his last three-year term. The other monk is middle-aged, energetic, and has been the major decision-maker at the temple since its construction. He is a beloved leader and likely to be the next Abbot. When I raised the issue of leadership to the two nuns, they laughed and replied: "We are their disciples!" However, in principle, leadership roles are not limited to monks. Indeed, the IBPS has many more nuns than monks and these nuns have assumed key leadership roles. When I asked the male leadership about women's position in the temple, they answered me similarly: Unlike some nations, Mahayana Buddhism in China has maintained the tradition of nunneries, so nuns remain able to be part of the *sangha* (leadership). When I pointed out that some sutras regard women as being of lower status than men and that there have been few famous Buddhist nuns, they responded, "That is because of historical reasons in which feudalism limited the role of women. In essence, Buddhism proclaims the equality of all living beings, which naturally includes equality between men and women."

There have been a number of lay women leaders at *Hsi-Nan*. In fact, before becoming a nun, one woman was the General Executive for many years, the highest lay position. There are also many women trustees and executive trustees, and many women hold other administrative positions. In short, there is substantial gender equality at this temple. This may seem surprising because traditional Chinese society has been very patriarchal; however, Chinese immigrants of both sexes tend to be well-educated professionals. Nor is such equality unique to Chinese Buddhists in the U.S. and therefore simply a response to the new social context. In Taiwan, there are more female than male Buddhist lay people, more nuns than monks, and more women assuming leadership roles. This reflects a general modernization trend to which Reformed Buddhism has been trying to adapt in both nations.

X. The Second Generation

Based on a review of magazines published by HNT, it is clear that the temple did little for members' children in its early years. In fact, most ritual services prohibited children and the temple did not provide child care during such services. There are two reasons for this. First, meditation, chanting and reciting sutras are adult activities that small children cannot do. Second, at that time most participants were fresh immigrants who were young professionals with few or no children. After the construction of the *Hsi-Nan* Temple, the second generation became a concern, as exemplified by the construction of a two-story education building in 1991. It has a large auditorium with a spacious stage on the first floor and nine classrooms and two offices on the second. In the fall of 1991, the *Bodhi* Chinese School began to hold classes on Sundays. They were prepared to handle about 100 stu-

dents but over 300 showed up, including many from families of non-members. In its first year, the school had twelve Chinese classes for children from grade school to high school, several English classes for children of recent immigrants, as well as piano, dancing, *Kung Fu*, *Tai Chi*, and computer classes. Temple members served as teachers and staff. By 1997, 30 teachers were involved in 27 different classes. The director of the Parents Association said, "As a parent I am gratified to be able to participate in the work of a Chinese school in a Western country. I am happy to see that our children can accept Chinese education besides five days of Western education each week." The school has made teaching Chinese language and culture, rather than Buddhist education, its top priority.

There is a Buddhist Youth Group which holds regular meetings at the temple on Sunday morning. In 1997, there were about 20 high school students in the youth group, mostly youth who do not want to go to the Chinese School but do want to hang out with peers at the temple. The youth group sponsors lectures on practical subjects, such as how to make friends and how to prepare to enter college. Sometimes they also have dharma talks. The current sponsor is a young, Taiwanese-born woman who attended a local university. Before her, the youth group sponsor was a middle-aged immigrant woman. That woman behaved like a traditional Chinese mother, employing an authoritarian style that caused tension and conflict with the youth. The new sponsor is younger and better understands American-born or raised Chinese youth, and is thus welcomed by the youth. Nonetheless, the youth group is very small. Many adults who attend Sunday services do not send their youth to this group. Some press them to go to the Chinese school, but many just leave their children home.

Almost no one in their twenties and thirties attends Sunday services at the temple. In other words, university students and young graduates are missing and most active participants are in their forties and fifties. When I asked the monks and others why this is the case, they said that they were happy just to see some grown-up young people occasionally come to visit the temple and the monks. It seems to me that the monks and parents do not really expect that their children will become Buddhist. In fact, many parents say they would not object to their children becoming Christian or having no religion at all, although they hope that they will become committed Buddhists. They say that whether an individual becomes a Buddhist or not largely depends upon one's *karma* and circumstances. What these parents are most concerned about is that their children know how to be good persons, defined more in moral than religious terms. In light of the Buddhist doctrine of *karma* (what you get in this life is the result of what you did in your previous life, and what you do in this life will cause what you will get in your following life), their emphasis on what their children do rather than what they believe is not un-Buddhist.

XI. Conclusion

The *Hsi-Nan* Temple is an independent, local temple in the tradition of Reformed Buddhism. Adapting to modern American society is highly emphasized, and earlier Buddhist adaptation to Chinese society makes it easy to justify such adaptive changes. However, this modernizing impulse also represents an effort to return to the roots of Buddhism and follow the spirit of the Buddha's teaching. Members of *Hsi-Nan* Temple do so by studying

Buddhist sutras that have been traditionally ignored, and also by insisting on a purer form of Buddhism stripped of folk practices. In addition, the temple stresses vegetarianism, celibacy, and other strict moral codes and seeks to form cooperative relationships with other orthodox Buddhist organizations locally, nationally, and internationally. The temple's adaptation to modern American society is a process of experimentation, but some things are considered so basic to Buddhism that they remain despite apparent change. For example, despite the tendency toward *de facto* congregationalism, authority is still very much in the hands of monks. The traditional importance of *Sangha* prevents a complete transformation of the temple from a community of monks and nuns to a community of Buddhist believers.

Most members of HNT are Chinese immigrants, and its Chinese identity is secure. This enables it to emphasize religious identity and strive to spread Buddhism to non-Chinese Americans. In this endeavor it has achieved moderate success in the last five years. Leaders and members of *Hsi-Nan* seek to present the Chinese version of Buddhism to Americans, following in the footsteps of Japanese Zen and Tibetan Lama Buddhists, and they wish to do so because they believe that they have something unique to contribute. Intra- and inter-ethnic relationships at the temple have been harmonious, in large measure because of member homogeneity both socio-economically and doctrinally. Harmony is also partially enforced through the continuing authority of the monks. However, *Hsi-Nan* has a history of just 20 years, and only time will tell whether and how long this harmony will persist. Indeed, only time will tell whether they will be sufficiently successful in attracting enough second-generation Chinese Buddhists and new converts to remain viable in the long run.