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# TRANSFORMATIONS IN NEW IMMIGRANT RELIGIONS AND THEIR GLOBAL IMPLICATIONS

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*Immigrant religious communities in the United States are undergoing profound transformations. Three processes of change occurring in new immigrant religions are described and analyzed: (1) adopting the congregational form in organizational structure and ritual, (2) returning to theological foundations, and (3) reaching beyond traditional ethnic and religious boundaries to include other peoples. These changes support the "new paradigm" in the sociology of religion that refutes secularization theories: Internal and external religious pluralism, instead of leading to the decline of religion, encourages institutional and theological transformations that energize and revitalize religions. Moreover, these changes are not merely attributable to Americanization. Rather, these changes have transnational implications for global religious systems—implications that are facilitated by the material and organizational resources that new U.S. immigrants possess.*

**I**MMIGRATION scholars continue to debate whether new immigrants, those who have come within the past four decades, will assimilate to U.S. society at the same pace and in the ways that characterized the earlier waves of immigrants (Alba and Nee 1997; Barkan, Vecoli, and Zung 1995; Conzen et al. 1992; Gans 1992; Glazer 1993; Kazal 1995; Morawska 1990; Perlman and Waldinger 1997; Portes and Zhou 1993; Rumbaut 1997). In part, the debate is colored by the changing racial/ethnic characteristics of new immigrants, with Asians and Latin Americans immigrating in far larger numbers than Europeans since the 1965

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amendments to the Immigration and Nationality Act. Historically, religious institutions were among the most important resources that immigrant groups used to reproduce their ethno-religious identity in new surroundings and to help them adjust to the challenges of surviving in a demanding and often threatening environment (Alexander 1987; Bodnar 1985; Dolan 1975, 1985; Herberg 1960; Park and Miller 1921; Pozzetta 1991; Smith 1978; Thomas and Znaniecki 1918–1920; Wind and Lewis 1994). Whereas the role of religion and religious institutions in the lives of earlier immigrants is well documented, little scholarly attention has been given to religious factors among recent migrants.<sup>1</sup> This lacunae is evi-

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<sup>1</sup> There are several reasons why religion has been neglected in studies of contemporary migration (Kivisto 1992; Warner 1998). First, immigration researchers, by and large, use survey data collected by government agencies such as the Bureau of the Census, the Immigration and Naturalization Service, and the Bureau of Labor Statistics—such agencies are not allowed to ask questions about religion. Other national surveys (e.g., the General Social Survey of the National

dent, for example, in *Immigrant America* (Portes and Rumbaut 1990), which hardly mentions religion, and in the *Handbook of International Migration: The American Experience* (Hirschman, Kasinitz, and DeWind 1999), which has no entry for religion in its index. Several recent research projects that include multiple ethnic and religious groups present data that demonstrate the continued centrality of religious institutions in the settlement patterns of the new immigrants (e.g., Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000a; Warner and Wittner 1998).

However, compared with earlier immigrants, who came mostly from Judeo-Christian Europe, many of the new immigrants from Asia have brought Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and other religions, and immigrants from South and Central America and some Asian countries have imported distinctive forms and styles of Catholicism and Protestantism. Amid the debate regarding how "new" this new immigration is compared with the "old," the limited but growing literature on religion and the new immigrants shows that religion, both Judeo-Christian and other traditions, continues to play the dual role of facilitating assimilation of its members and preserving ethnicity (Kim and Hurh 1993; Min 1992; Numrich 1996; Warner and Wittner 1998; Williams 1988; F. Yang 1999a). In the study of the new immigration, religion, and social changes, an important question is yet to be answered: What institutional changes do new immigrant religious communities undergo?

The issue of religious transformations raises important theoretical questions in the study of new immigration and also for the debates on religious secularization and dis-

cussions of globalization. In the sociology of religion, the "old paradigm"—that religious secularization is associated with modernization and pluralism—has been challenged as scholars demonstrate that religion is not declining, but that indeed it is thriving in pluralist American society (Finke and Stark 1992; Shibley 1996; Stark 1999; Warner 1993). The religiosity of many of the new immigrants is one factor contributing to the current robustness of religion in America (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000a; Warner and Wittner 1998), a trend that is reminiscent of the religious vitality that existed in this country during the earlier waves of European migration. Moreover, our data show that internal and external pluralism, instead of leading to the decline of religion, in fact promotes institutional and theological transformations that energize and revitalize the religions.

In the course of immigration and settlement, immigrants commonly transplant their traditional religious institutions in their new land. Rather than simply recreating religious structures as they existed in their home countries, however, both "old" and "new" immigrants adapt their religions to social conditions of the host country. Transplantation is a process of transformation. We find three processes that contribute to the transformation of immigrant religion in contemporary America: (1) adopting the congregational form in organizational structure and ritual, (2) returning to theological foundations, and (3) reaching beyond traditional boundaries to include other peoples.<sup>2</sup> We argue that these three processes are occurring across a variety of religions and ethnic immigrant groups and, together, challenge secularization theo-

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Opinion Research Center) fail to include sufficient numbers of small religious populations, such as Vietnamese Buddhists or Argentine evangelicals, to make analysis possible. Second, it is often insiders who study their own religious and/or ethnic group and we do not yet have a crucial mass of immigrant social scientists interested in a variety of religions. Third, there is often an antireligious bias among Asian, Hispanic, and African scholars in ethnic studies departments who associate religion with the Christian missionaries who joined with politicians and businessmen to colonize Third World countries (Yoo 1996).

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<sup>2</sup> We considered possible alternative terms to describe these three processes. For example, the first process could be labeled as institutional isomorphism or convergence. However, isomorphism or convergence does not provide a concrete model of institutional structure and formality. The second process shares some characteristics with fundamentalism, but also differs from it in important ways. We do not use any term ending with "ism" to avoid theological implications or ideological complications; we also experimented with congregationalization, pristinization, and universalization to highlight that these are ongoing, and unfinished, processes.

ries: Neither the functions of religion nor the significance of religion is declining among immigrants. Likewise, these processes may be viewed as an Americanization of immigrant religions, as they are indeed adaptations to American contexts. However, these religious adaptations have significance beyond assimilation; they have global implications and transnational influences.

## METHODS

We focus on the rapidly increasing number of religious institutions in the United States whose membership is wholly or predominantly composed of "new immigrants," that is, those who arrived since the mid-1960s. In addition to thousands of informal places of worship including house churches, scriptural study groups, paraliturgical groups, domestic altars, and neighborhood festivals, immigrants have established many of their own formal places for worship and have changed the demographics of existing Anglo congregations that they have joined. According to the best available estimates, there are over 3,500 Catholic parishes where Mass is celebrated in Spanish, and 7,000 Hispanic/Latino Protestant congregations, most of them Pentecostal or Evangelical churches, and many of them nondenominational (Warner 1998). In 1988, the last count available, there were 2,018 Korean-American churches in the United States, and in 1994 there were approximately 700 Chinese-American Protestant churches. In the early 1990s, there were between 1,000 and 1,200 mosques and Islamic centers, 1,500 to 2,000 Buddhist temples and meditation centers, and over 400 Hindu temples (Warner 1998).<sup>3</sup> Unlike previous eras in American history, in many neighborhoods today, Islamic mosques, Hindu and Buddhist temples, Sikh gurdwaras, and various ethnic shrines and storefront churches exist alongside church steeples.

Despite the growing presence in American society of non-Christian religious institutions, the vast majority of new immigrants

are Christian. While we have no exact data on the religious affiliations of immigrants, given what we do know about the national origins of immigrants, religion in their home countries, and statistical data on the growth and changing demographics of church membership in the United States, it is clear that the new immigrant and ethnic groups are overwhelmingly Christian. Many come from Latin American origins that are predominantly Christian, such as Mexico, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Haiti, El Salvador, and Guatemala. Filipinos (the second largest Asian-origin immigrant group) are predominantly Christian as well. While Christianity is a minority religion in Korea, Vietnam, and India, there has been selective immigration by Christians from those countries (Chai 1998; Hurh and Kim 1990; Warner 2000). Rather than immigrants "de-Christianizing" religion in America, they have, in fact, "de-Europeanized" American Christianity (Busto 1996; Maffy-Kipp 1997; Warner 1998; F. Yang 1999a). Moreover, as Maffy-Kipp (1997) argues, "The rapidity with which Asians have become Christian and Latinos have become Protestant forces us to reconsider our notions of Christianity as a 'Western' tradition that has encountered the mysterious East and triumphed over it" (p. 127). In the past 30 years, therefore, the immigrants have not only introduced "new and strange" varieties of religion into the United States, they have also changed the face of American Christianity.

Most of the data we report here were collected as part of the Religion, Ethnicity, and New Immigrants Research (RENIR) project in Houston, Texas. Ethnographic case studies of 13 immigrant religious institutions in the Houston metropolitan area were conducted by a team of researchers between Spring 1997 and Summer 1998. Common observation protocols and interview schedules were used at each site to ensure comparable data (available from the authors on request).<sup>4</sup> Interviews were conducted with clerical and lay leaders, new immigrants, and

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of the difficulties associated with enumerating the number of members as well as the religious institutions of new immigrants, see Numrich (2000).

<sup>4</sup> For a complete description of the methodology, see Ebaugh and Chafetz (2000a). Members of the research team (including the authors) conducted the interviews, most of which were tape recorded.

established residents and youth. Samples were representative of members' ages, length of residency in the United States, length of membership in the congregation, gender, social class, and degree of participation in the services and activities of the congregation. The 13 congregations we studied include one Greek Orthodox church; one Hindu temple; one Zoroastrian center (most of whose members come from Pakistan); two Buddhist temples (one Vietnamese and the other Chinese); a Muslim mosque (mostly Indo-Pakistani in membership); two Roman Catholic churches (one overwhelmingly Mexican and the other composed of seven formally organized nationality groups); and five Protestant churches (one composed of 49 nationalities, one dominated by Argentines, one mostly Mexican, one totally Korean, and one almost totally Chinese). The senior author also spent several years studying Chinese Christian churches in the Washington, D.C. area and has been a participant observer in Chinese Buddhist temples and Christian churches in other metropolitan areas. In addition to these data sources, we draw on findings from published works by other scholars on immigrant religions in other parts of the country and of the world.

### CONTEMPORARY IMMIGRANTS: MARGINS AND CENTERS

Immigrants in the United States experience marginalization in many ways: Some forms of marginalization are common to all immigrants; others are distinctive for post-1965 immigrants. First, as migrants they become diasporic to their ancestral home and its traditions. In some instances, they are moving away from the ritual and organizational center of their religious and cultural system (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000a; Sarna 1998; Yang and Ebaugh forthcoming). Second, being immigrants they are guests, strangers, newcomers, and sometimes are even perceived as intruders in the cultural system of the host society. Third, many contemporary immigrants in the United States are racial minorities (Africans, Asians, and mestizo Hispanics) in a racially hierarchical American society (Foner 1987; Omi and Winant 1994). Fourth, many new immigrants to the United States bring religions that are unfa-

miliar and often considered strange to people in an overwhelmingly Christian society (e.g., Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism, Yoruba). Fifth, not only do immigrants become racial and religious minorities in the United States but their countries of origin are often on the periphery (Third World countries) of the modern world-system (Wallerstein 1979). Peripheral countries have commonly suffered colonialism and post-colonial civil wars, political turmoil, economic collapses, human catastrophes, and the "brain drain" of educated strata. The process of modernization in these countries is not self-initiated and self-paced, but coerced upon them by developed countries, and it is often a process synonymous with or overlapping with Westernization or Americanization. In brief, social, political, economic, religious and cultural marginalization has been part of the day-to-day experience for people living in these countries, and racial and religious marginalization adds another stress to the lives of immigrants who come to America.

On the other hand, however, immigrants to the United States come to a major core country in the contemporary world-system. Since World War II, the United States has been considered the most powerful country in the world with unique material wealth, advanced technologies, sophisticated social institutions, military strength, and international political influences. Capitalizing on the strengths of the core country, immigrants can, in turn, exert economic, political, social, cultural, and religious influences on their communities of origin (Basch, Glick-Schiller, and Blanc 1994; Kearney 1995; Schiller 1999; M. Smith and Guarinzo 1998).

Moreover, because of the selectivity of U.S. immigration laws since 1965, a large portion of the contemporary immigrant population is composed of highly educated professionals, political refugees, and intellectual exiles who are elites in their home countries (Portes and Rumbaut 1996). Therefore, for these immigrants, their social, political, and cultural as well as economic resources are substantial. Indeed, they are among the most educated, energetic, and creative people, not only in their home countries but also in American society and the world. While the United States has a higher

proportion of college-educated-or-above people than most countries, many immigrant ethnic groups have a higher proportion of college-educated-or-above people than U.S.-born whites and blacks (Portes and Rumbaut 1996; Rumbaut 1997). Immigrant skilled workers are often pioneers in technology development and are highly sought after by major companies. Moreover, contemporary immigrants are concentrated in metropolitan areas where cultural pluralism and cosmopolitanism are part of their everyday lives. Their transnational connections with their home countries, facilitated by advanced technologies of communication, transportation, and material wealth, also are an important stream of globalization (Kearney 1995; Laguerre 1998; Ong and Nonini 1997; Schiller 1999; Skeldon 1994;).

In brief, the power and influence of the core country in the world-system, the tangible and intangible resources of the new immigrants, and the social and cultural experiences of their living in pluralistic America are forces that together provide necessary conditions for contemporary immigrants to exert influence within their global religious systems. These conditions are facilitated by the three general trends of change in immigrant religious communities—namely, adopting congregational forms, returning to theological foundations, and increasing membership inclusiveness to incorporate other peoples.

### **ADOPTING THE CONGREGATIONAL FORM**

Contemporary immigrant religions are adopting the congregational form in two ways: in organizational structure, and in ritual formality. Each of these processes characterizes the structure of American Protestantism and, given that approximately 60 percent of Americans identify as Protestant (Kosmin and Lachman 1993; Roof and McKinney 1987), adapting to the Protestant model is one form of organizational assimilation or Americanization.

#### **CONGREGATIONAL STRUCTURE**

In contrast to religious institutions in their home countries, as immigrants establish

places of worship in the United States they tend to structure them along the model of U.S. Protestant congregations. Warner (1994:54) calls this “de facto congregationalism,” a structure modeled on the reformed Protestant tradition of the congregation as a community that gathers voluntarily. Warner (1994:73) argues that “the congregational mentality has great practical force as an unofficial norm in American religious life.” Congregationalism is especially foreign to many non-Judeo-Christian religions. However, not only are immigrant Christian churches developing de facto congregationalism, but so are many non-Christian religious communities (Bankston and Zhou 2000; Beyer 1998; Numrich 1996; Wind and Lewis 1994). In contrast to denominational hierarchies, congregationalism focuses on the local community as a congregation, which includes the increased voluntary participation of members in religious functions, a lay-centered community, and multiple functions of the religious community (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000c; Warner 1994).

**VOLUNTARY MEMBERSHIP.** In home countries from which the new immigrants migrated, people tend to be born into a religion that has been the tradition for generations for the nation or ethnic group. In contrast, there is less social pressure in America to adhere to a particular religion, or any religion at all—alternatives to one’s traditional religion are many and easily accessible. Consequently, joining (or leaving) a religious group is more likely a conscious, personal act of choosing and is part of the “new voluntarism” that characterizes contemporary American religion (Roof and McKinney 1987). For example, Buddhism is a major traditional religion in China and Vietnam and has long had vast influence in these cultures. Buddhism is diffused within other institutions and is something “in the air” (C. Yang [1961] 1967). Therefore, responding to poll or survey questions, many Chinese and Vietnamese immigrants choose Buddhism as their religious preference (Dart 1997). In the United States, however, Buddhism remains an obscure minority religion, a “new religious movement” or “cult” (Numrich 1996; Prebish and Tanaka 1999). Those immigrants who want to experience Buddhism have to make efforts to attend a

Buddhist temple or join a Buddhist group (Huynh 2000; F. Yang 2000). Muslim and Hindu immigrants react in the same way (Badr 2000; Jacob and Thakur 2000). One Muslim immigrant explained,

Due to city ordinances, the Adhan, or call to prayer, is not broadcast via loudspeaker to the surrounding neighborhood here, but you can hear it everywhere on the streets in Muslim countries. When you walk on the street and hear the call for prayer, you are constantly reminded of prayer. However, over here, you have to find the time yourself, do everything yourself.<sup>5</sup>

Many immigrants whom we interviewed expressed this feeling—in the workplace or the neighborhood community, they have to be with many other kinds of people. But the mosque or temple is a secluded place where they can be comfortable with each other and do their own thing. Therefore, they make efforts to attend the temple or mosque.

Organizationally, the religious community “cannot assume the loyal adherence of its members as if they were all part of the same tribe; it must actively recruit them” (Warner 1994:63). Immigrant religious organizations—Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, and Zoroastrian as well as Christian—all have developed various programs and activities to attract immigrant adherents. For this reason, the Chinese Buddhist Hsi Nan Temple<sup>6</sup> in Houston abandoned its original secluded site and built a new temple in the center of the Chinese immigrant community in southwest Houston. The temple also widely advertises its regular and special activities through local Chinese newspapers and on the Internet. While the temple is open to all people who want to come, monks and lay leaders actively recruit people to join, and design programs to increase their participation and commitment. They make these adaptations in order to compete for followers with other religions as well as other Buddhist groups in the pluralist social environment.

<sup>5</sup> Several quotations from members of religious communities appear in the text of this article. These quotations come from RENIR interviews and site reports.

<sup>6</sup> Pseudonyms are used for the immigrant religious groups surveyed in the RENIR project.

The growing Protestantization of Latin America (Levine 1995; Martin 1990; C. Smith 1994; Stoll 1990) is also reflected in the United States in the competition between Catholic and Protestant (especially evangelical) churches for Hispanic immigrants. In the Argentine Protestant evangelical church that we studied there were many members who converted from Catholicism upon their arrival in Houston. The conversion was partly because of the large community of Argentine members of that Protestant church as well as the absence of a specifically Argentine Catholic church in the city. Likewise, priests in the Mexican immigrant Catholic church in our study, located in the oldest barrio in Houston, constantly bemoan the threat posed by the Protestant evangelical churches that are rapidly expanding in the neighborhood. While some parishioners defect and join these other churches, many others attend both churches—a behavior that is threatening to the Catholic clerics who fear the continued loss of Hispanic Catholics to Protestantism. In this barrio, competition for members has become a major issue in the religious market (Finke and Stark 1992; Iannacone 1991). Immigrant religious leaders from Christian and non-Christian congregations alike are aware of the need to reach out to new immigrants, rather than waiting for them to come to the temple or church; many leaders fear they are losing the immigrants, especially young people, to other religions.

**LAY LEADERSHIP.** In many Buddhist, Hindu, and Muslim societies, lay believers usually are not leaders in their temples and mosques. Traditionally, Buddhism in some Asian countries (e.g., Korea and China) is a monastery-centered religion where monks and nuns live in temples, often monasteries in secluded mountains, whereas lay believers are pilgrims or spiritual clients. In many countries, lay Buddhists do not become members of a particular temple, but patronize more than one temple. In the United States, however, many immigrant Buddhist groups have started a membership system with annual dues. For example, the Chinese Buddhist Hsi Nan Temple started with a structure much like traditional Chinese Buddhism. In 1979, a monk came to Houston, purchased a house outside the city, and be-

gan to gather Chinese Buddhist believers. However, in order to register with the government as a nonprofit religious organization, a board of trustees was formed that included the monk and all his initial eight followers. Three years later, the temple started a membership system in which an individual or family paid \$10 a year to be listed as a member. After it built a new temple in 1990 in the center of the Chinese immigrant community, the temple's membership grew to several hundred members. By the mid-1990s, the temple further strengthened its organizational structure by selecting core members to be "Dharma Guardians" (*hu fa weiyuan*) who are certified as regular, dues-paying members who have the right to vote and to be nominated as candidates for trustees. While three monks are permanent trustees, 18 lay trustees are elected by and among the core members. The board of trustees is the decision-making body for temple affairs, and because the monks are permanent trustees, the power structure of the temple remains monk-centered. However, lay participation in administration and decision-making is established and has increased over time. The division of labor and functions of each administrative department are defined in writing; legalistic procedures are followed with a written constitution and bylaws. In effect, the ownership of the temple is shifting from the monks to the laity.

Similarly, many immigrant Hindu temples, Islamic mosques, and other religious communities are gradually developing some type of membership system, and lay participation in decision-making is increasing. In fact, many immigrant religious institutions are initiated and established by lay believers. Because of immigration regulations, religious immigrants (priests, ministers, monks, nuns, etc.) often come to the United States as employees of an established immigrant congregation. These changes toward a lay-centered community are in part adjustments to federal or local government regulations, and in part are adaptations to the social and cultural norms of American society. Some immigrants, especially clergy, try to resist these changes because of theology or religious tradition. However, American laws and democratic norms appear to be overriding forces favor-

ing the changes toward a lay-centered religious community.

Christian immigrant churches in the United States also tend to be more lay-led than they are in home countries (Alexander 1987; Buczek 1991). For example, the Greek Orthodox church in Houston, whose membership is 95 percent Greeks and Greek-Americans, is governed by a priest and parish council cooperatively, along with a board committee consisting of elected members who are in good standing in the church. In contrast, in Greece the priest usually has supreme legislative authority.

**EXPANSION OF SERVICES.** Another characteristic of adopting a congregational structure is the expansion of types of services provided to members. Immigrant congregations are no longer just sites for religious worship; they are assuming multiple functions, including both religious and secular classes, provision of social services, recreational centers, and social spaces for civic functions such as voting and citizenship classes. The Argentine church in Houston recently built a new building, constructed by immigrants themselves in a heavily immigrant neighborhood. Its large community center complex includes classrooms, a swimming pool, basketball and soccer courts, and a park with barbecue grills for the typical Argentine *asada*. In fact, the congregation changed its name from Evangelical Christian Church to the Center for Family Ministries, a name change indicative of the church's new mission to provide numerous social programs as well as a place for worship and religious services.

In many religions, traditionally, the central religious site is designated for religious purposes only. For example, the Muslim mosque is traditionally for collective prayer and a Hindu shrine is for personal devotions. In the United States, however, the function of these religious centers is diversifying. Like U.S. Christian churches, Buddhist and Hindu temples, Islamic mosques, and Zoroastrian centers are changing from prayer and ritual centers to community centers where immigrants celebrate weddings, conduct funerals, counsel families, provide social services to the needy, hold cultural activities, and so on (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000c). In Vietnam and China, Buddhists commonly



have weddings at home or in restaurants, but never at a temple, which is perceived as a place to honor the dead and to teach people to rid themselves of worldly pleasures. In the United States, however, Buddhism gives worldly life more positive affirmation. The senior author observed a "Buddhist wedding" at a temple in Chicago at which a monk presided, consecrated, and blessed the marriage. Temple records show that the Hsi Nan Temple in Houston has also held Buddhist weddings and recorded them as innovative practices. Some families even have the abbot come to their homes to bless newborn babies. Many of our Buddhist respondents remarked that these "Americanized" practices are unthinkable in their traditional home societies.

While Christian churches have a long tradition of social service involvement, leaders in Buddhist and Hindu temples, Muslim mosques, and Zoroastrian centers are learning to run charity and welfare programs, and are establishing parochial schools. Immigrant congregations are also incorporating Christian ways of imparting religious education by offering Sunday school classes for children and adults. For example, some Buddhists hold sutra study classes for the youth as well as adults; the Zoroastrians have Gatha classes, modeled on Protestant Bible study groups.

**ORGANIZATIONAL NETWORKS.** While adopting *de facto* or *de jure* congregationalism in local organization, some immigrant congregations are also developing regional, national, and international networks and organizations—structures that resemble Protestant denominations. Denominationalism is often seen as an American form of religious organization in which local congregations that share traditions and doctrine are part of a large-scale organization that controls or coordinates member congregations (Niebuhr 1929). Among the immigrant religious communities, the Fo Kuang Shan (Buddha Light Mountain) from Taiwan is a Buddhist monastery order or denomination that was founded in 1967 by the charismatic monk Hsing Yun. The banner of this denomination is *ren jian fojiao* (Buddhism in the world, or humanistic Buddhism), which emphasizes building the Buddhist ideal Pure Land in this world (*ren jian jingtu*). It has many branch

temples or centers throughout North America, with headquarters at the famous Hsi Lai Temple near Los Angeles. The True Buddha Sect, a Vajrayana or esoteric Buddhism founded in Seattle in the 1980s by an immigrant from Taiwan, has established branch temples in most metropolitan areas of the United States and Canada. Some Vietnamese temples in North America have formed the World Vietnamese Buddhist Order. An independent Korean Presbyterian Church denomination in the United States has been present for many years. There is also an established Taiwanese-speaking Evangelical Formosan Church, which has about 30 churches throughout North America and has expanded to Central America, Australia, and New Zealand. Zoroastrians have had a World Zoroastrian Organization (WZO) that operated in London. However, the WZO membership includes both individuals and associations, which makes it hard to function as a worldwide body. In the 1970s, consciously following the Christian denominational model, a Federation of Zoroastrian Associations in North America (FZANA) was formed. FZANA accepts only association members. Now the FZANA model is expanding to other parts of the world, and the Houston Zoroastrians have organized a World Zoroastrian Congress (WZC), which was held for the first time in 2000 in Houston. The WZC, based on the FZANA model, is competing and probably replacing the WZO as the highest worldwide organization of Zoroastrians. Muslim and Hindu immigrants have also formed their own regional, national, and international associations. Similarly, ethnic nondenominational Christian churches, such as the independent Chinese Christian churches, are uniting in regional and national associations.

#### **CONGREGATIONAL RITUAL**

In addition to organizing their religious institutions along a congregational model, many immigrant religions are also taking up ritual formalities commonly found in Protestant churches, the second aspect of adopting a congregational form. This includes changes in times, places, and procedures of gatherings, roles of the clergy, forms of reli-

gious education, and replacing a sacred language with a vernacular one.

**TIMES FOR WORSHIP.** In most religious groups, times of worship and sacred holidays follow time cycles. In Christianity, the cycles are weekly worship and annual liturgical seasons, cycles based on scriptures, doctrine, and traditions. In the United States and many other countries, the weekly cycle has become the societal norm and rules the rhythms of work as well as public and private lives. Christmas and Easter are national holidays with social and cultural celebrations. Non-Christian religions traditionally do not follow these Christian cycles, but immigrants in America frequently adapt to these societal rhythms. Therefore, Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, and Zoroastrians increasingly gather on Sundays rather than on their traditional day of worship. Some Buddhists continue to hold chanting rituals on the first and fifteenth days of the month of the lunar calendar, but Sunday religious gatherings have become more frequent, partly because of members' work schedules. Even the celebration of the Buddha's birthday is adjusted to a weekend day closest to it, as are many birthdays of important Hindu gods. While immigrant Muslims in Houston continue to gather for the traditional Friday prayer, some mosques also regularly hold Sunday gatherings and Sunday school classes. Similarly, Zoroastrians in Houston have had a Sunday school offering religious education for children and youth since the early 1980s.

**WAYS TO WORSHIP.** Likewise, customs relating to ways of worship have also changed in immigrant congregations. In traditional Chinese and Vietnamese Buddhism, when people gather in the temple for collective chanting, they often sit cross-legged on cushions on the floor. Today, Hsi Nan Temple has installed long pews in two columns, just like those commonly seen in Christian churches. During the Sunday service, instead of the traditional fan-bei (bhasa) music that aims at calming the mind, a choir often sings hymns with praising themes, some with traditional Protestant melodies. While the leading monk sits on a special cushion in front of the congregation, he leads the collective chanting and rituals, and also presents expositions of a sutra,

reminiscent of preaching in Christian churches. Preaching has increasingly become the central act of the religious gathering in Muslim mosques, and in Hindu and Zoroastrian temples as well. Moreover, some non-Christian congregations are consciously modeling their services after Christian ones. For example, shortly after some visits to Christian churches, a monk of Hsi Nan suggested that the temple adopt procedures to allow people to stand and sit during the Sunday service, and to have ritual responsorial exchanges between the monk and the congregation. Hindu and Zoroastrian temples used to be places for individual prayers and devotion; today, many temples have begun collective chanting and praying.

**ROLES OF THE CLERGY.** In the United States, the roles of religious clergy in immigrant communities are also changing. In traditional society, the clergy are usually experts in religious rituals and scriptures. In the United States, however, immigrant believers seek out the clergy for various kinds of help, including counseling on marriage and family life, visiting the sick, and receiving traveling members and guests. These are normally defined as pastoral work in Christian churches, but are nontraditional roles for most Buddhist, Hindu, and Islamic clergy. As the religious community becomes a congregation, the clergy are obligated to provide these pastoral services to their members.

**LANGUAGE OF WORSHIP.** Many immigrant religious communities face a language problem when trying to pass on their traditional religion to the younger generations. Whereas the immigrant generation wishes to pass on the traditional language, which they regarded as integral to their ethnicity, American-born and American-raised children often have English as their first or only language. Mullins (1987) develops a three-stage model that immigrant-ethnic churches often follow. The first stage of a monolingual immigrant church evolves into the second stage, characterized by a bilingual minister who conducts services in English as well as in the ethnic language as an accommodation to the needs of both immigrant and later generations. The third and final stage is a monolingual (English), often multi-ethnic church. A major dilemma present in each of the immigrant congregations we studied was that of

encouraging the participation of young people (many of whom are pressing for English services) while maintaining the ethnic/cultural character of the congregation. In many instances, second-generation members are establishing their own worship services in English while maintaining the strong ethnic and religious character of the immigrant church (Chai 1998; F. Yang 1999b). While many new immigrant religions are committed to the use of their holy language in parts of their formal worship rites (e.g., Arabic, Sanskrit, Pali, Avestan, classic Chinese), increasingly they are translating their holy scriptures into English, preaching in English (or in the ethnic language with consecutive English interpretation), praying in English, and teaching the religion to the young people in English.

In addition to challenges posed by an English-speaking second generation, in some Chinese, Indian, and Muslim communities, immigrants come from diverse home states and themselves speak very different dialects or languages. For them, English is often their only shared language. Therefore, because of the pragmatic need to communicate, English is becoming increasingly prominent in such immigrant religious communities (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000b). Historically, adopting the vernacular language was one of the fundamental changes Protestants made when they broke from the Roman Catholic Church. Today, various immigrant religions in America are following suit.

### RETURNING TO THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Adopting the congregational form in immigrant religious communities is accompanied by a simultaneous process—returning to the theological foundations of the religion. The institutional changes discussed above require theological justifications, and diverse subtraditions and ethnic groups within a religion press the immigrants to examine the commonalities and differences of their beliefs and practices. The religious and cultural pluralism in American society also challenges immigrants to provide theological foundations to uphold their distinct religion.

Adopting the congregational form creates profound changes within immigrant congre-

gations compared with the ways in which religions have been practiced in many home countries. Interestingly, however, many immigrant religious leaders perceive these changes not as departing from the principles of their religion but rather as attempts to return to its roots or to the true spirit of its religion, a process reminiscent of Rudolph and Rudolph's (1967) work on the "modernity of tradition." Based on studies of India's traditional political system, they argue that elements of traditional society can contain ideas and structures that provide the impetus for modernization. In their words, "The components of 'new' men may exist among the 'old,' and successful new leaders can often create effective change by building on traditional rationales, structures and practices" (Rudolph and Rudolph 1967:23). Mahatma Gandhi, for example, used many classic Hindu texts to justify and buttress his call for nonviolence.

For many Muslim immigrants in our study, the evolution of the mosque from simply a place to pray to a center of social activity and learning means a reversion to the dynamic role the mosque was given in the days of Prophet Muhammad. Again and again, Muslim interviewees echoed the same sentiments: The original mosques in the time of the prophet were not merely houses of worship; they doubled as schools, and they also tripled as the place where people hung out together. Similarly, a monk of Hsi Nan Temple pointedly claimed that Buddhism was not a hermit religion in the ancient past. He quoted a classic poem to say that in the Tang Dynasty (618–907 A.D.), historical records indicate that Buddhist temples were found in every other block in Chang-An, the capital of China at that time. Only since the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644 A.D.) were Buddhist monks and nuns driven out of society (for political reasons) by the emperors, and forced to stay in remote mountains. According to this monk, the Buddha himself gave up seclusive self-meditation and actively proclaimed the Dharma in the society. Therefore, being engaged in the community and taking up social and cultural functions are seen as natural and as a desire to return to religious roots. Likewise, Finney (1991) argues that Zen Buddhism has undergone sec-

tarian reformation in its transmission to the West.

The internal diversity of a religion is a force for religious changes with theological justifications. Because of the large volume of post-1965 immigrants from various countries, diverse subtraditions of a religion and its diverse national groups have settled in the same cities in the United States. These immigrants may have read or heard about other subtraditions or peoples of the same religion; however, in the United States they meet each other for the first time as next-door neighbors. This is often exciting for people who desire to find solidarity with others in a common faith, especially among minority religions (Sarna 1998). For example, Buddhism is traditionally divided into the subtraditions of Mahayana (which spread to most of China, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam), Theravada (found mostly in Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, and other Southeast Asian countries), and Vajrayana (mostly Tibetan Lamaism), which is sometimes classified as part of the Mahayana tradition. Within Mahayana Buddhism there are Chan (or Zen), Pure Land, Tian Tai, and many other sects or schools. Some of our Buddhist interviewees said that out of curiosity they had "checked out" Buddhist temples of other ethnic groups or traditions. Regular attendees at the Chinese Mahayana Hsi Nan Temple include people from Burma, India, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Vietnam. Buddhist leaders of various ethnic temples and of different Buddhist traditions have formed the Houston Buddhist Council for united activities. The Houston Muslim mosques, under the umbrella of the Islamic Center of Greater Houston, include people from Albania, Bangladesh, Bosnia, Egypt, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Trinidad, and so on. While Zoroastrianism is a kind of ethnic religion, the Houston Zoroastrian community comprises people who immigrated from India, Iran, Pakistan, Africa, Canada, Australia, Great Britain, and the Middle East. A Houston Hindu temple has 50 percent Tamils, 30 percent Telugus, 15 percent Keralites, and about 5 percent Gujaratis, Karnatikans, and other Indians. In addition, all of these immigrant religious groups have received native-born Americans, white or black, as participants or

converts. The presence of internal pluralism compels people to go through a process of finding commonalities and differences in the subtraditions, and more important, attempting to identify the essentials in their religion.

When achieving a consensus among people of diverse subtraditions and ethnic backgrounds is the goal, one common strategy is to go back to the original founder and/or some historic, authoritative leaders of the religion, and to the commonly recognized holy scriptures. For example, after contacting Theravada Buddhists in Houston, the Mahayana Buddhists in Hsi Nan Temple began to study the *za a han jing* (*Samyuktagama*), a Buddhist scripture (sutra) that Theravada Buddhists hold as essential but Chinese Mahayana Buddhists typically neglect. Both Mahayana and Theravada Buddhists agree that the *za a han jing* is a sutra composed in the early period of Buddhism, before the emergence of Mahayana Buddhism. Today, Chinese Mahayana Buddhists in Houston acknowledge that Mahayana Buddhism broke from Theravada Buddhism several hundred years *after* the Buddha, and only the Buddha is the highest authority of Buddhism. Therefore, they have begun to pay greater attention to the sutras that other Buddhists consider essential. This helps them to understand, accept, and unite with Theravada Buddhists.

Hindus in the United States exemplify a slightly different pattern for uniting various ethnic Hindu groups. Since Hindus do not acknowledge one founder, they attempt to unify Hindus by returning to classic texts while abandoning certain local customs, a solution that is called "Sanskritization" by Srinivas (1966) and which is happening in modern India as well. Several hundred Hindu clergy and community leaders in the United States have formed a World Hindu Council (Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America), and they planned to formulate *samskar* (a code of conduct) that "will focus on universally accepted Hindu concepts and practices" (Vara 1998:1). The strategy of resorting to classic roots clearly has an ecumenical tone.

Ecumenism is especially evident among many third-generation Greek Americans in our Houston study who favor a pan-orthodox Christian Church that would unite the

many ethnic orthodox churches that now exist (e.g., Syrian, Russian, Rumanian, Bulgarian, Albanian, Ukranian).<sup>7</sup> By emphasizing common origins, doctrines, and rituals, the pan-orthodox supporters favor the establishment of a united Orthodox church in order to increase the visibility and the religious, economic, and political power of Eastern orthodoxy in America as well as to emphasize unity among believers (Tsoukalas 2000).

Reaching toward theological foundations also occurs in the process of attempting to separate religion from culture. Islam in the Arab world strives to be a culture in itself because Muslim life regulates almost every aspect of daily life. When Muslim immigrants come together, however, they begin to realize that Islam has been adapted to various cultures in various parts of the world, and what they have been doing religiously may not have a scriptural basis. For example, in Pakistan, men pray with a cap on the head, but Pakistan immigrants see that Arab men do not do that. They then ask,

These are the Arabs that we thought were the leaders of Islam. How can they not be praying with a cap? . . . Well, how did this whole cap thing originate? Is that really Islamic? Or is it culture?

Therefore, gathering together with people of diverse ethnic and national origins compels Muslims to go back to original or earlier Islam to find theological justifications for what they must keep and what may be given up. We found that a consensus in the Houston Islamic Center is: If you read more Quran, you will learn and become less biased in favor or against a particular cultural tradition. The belief is that interpreting the Quran and the Hadiths literally will reduce cultural biases or disagreements due to differing cultural backgrounds. Muslim leaders in the community frequently make this plea:

<sup>7</sup> There are 11 Eastern Orthodox churches in the United States: the Antiochian Orthodox Church, the Orthodox Church of Russia, the Orthodox Church of Bulgaria, the Orthodox Church of Georgia, the Orthodox Church of Albania, the Siberian Orthodox Church, the American Carpatho-Russian Church, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, the Belarusian Orthodox Church, the Romanian Orthodox Church, and the Greek Orthodox Church (Robertson 1995).

We must learn to separate what is cultural Islam and what is the real Islam.

A Greek Orthodox interviewee expressed a similar idea:

I think we should be a little more educated about those things that have to do with Orthodox beliefs and those that have to do with Greek culture.

She argued that a pan-Orthodox church would encourage people to practice orthodoxy as "religion, not just culture." *Following Jesus without Dishonoring Your Parents* (Yep et al. 1998), a book written by a team of five authors of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean ethnicity, presents the struggles of Asian American Protestant Christians in their efforts to separate religion and culture.

The presence of white and black American converts at immigrant religious communities also pushes for separating religion and specific cultures. A white woman who converted to Islam succinctly stated,

I'm very interested in learning about Islam and practicing Islam and being a Muslim, but I'm not that interested in learning about another culture and replacing my American culture with another. I just want to replace it with Islam.

Similarly, we have interviewed some white American converts to Buddhism or Hinduism who often choose only the philosophical or meditation part of Buddhism or Hinduism while rejecting cultural rituals, an approach that is commonly found in other temples (Numrich 1996; Prebish and Tanaka 1999).

The external diversity or contemporary pluralism is another important social force for seeking a religion's theological roots. Post-1965 immigrants have arrived at a time when pluralism has become an inescapable reality and an accepted ideology in American society. Contemporary immigrants typically have settled in metropolitan cities and suburbs, and many initially came to attend U.S. universities where pluralism is most visible, colorful, and often advocated. The religious new immigrants have to come to terms with the reality of religious pluralism. In a pluralist environment, the authority of a religion that is based simply on tradition (i.e., we must follow the religion that our an-

cestors believed) loses its power, especially for young people in public schools and colleges. The metropolitan and cosmopolitan environment makes contact and interactions with people of other religions almost unavoidable, and that contact inevitably presents challenges to taken-for-granted traditional ways of life and beliefs. Claiming the absolute, universal truth that one's religion possesses is one response to such challenges. Not only do the monotheistic Christian and Islamic religions make such universal and absolute claims, we find that immigrant Buddhists, Hindus, Zoroastrians, and others do the same. Although Eastern religions usually do not claim to have the only truth, nevertheless the religious immigrants frequently claim that their religion possesses some unique beliefs and practices. They believe that such unique beliefs and practices can combat social evils and vices that no other religion can do.

Contrary to the conventional wisdom that pluralism leads to relativism or to the rejection of absolutism, fundamentalist claims of absolute truth and values are thriving in postmodern society (Shibley 1996; Woodberry and Smith 1998). Ammerman (1987) points out that Christian fundamentalism is thriving in metropolitan suburbs where tradition meets modernity. Living in the uncertain, changing, and pluralistic modern world, many people desire certainty, eternity, and absoluteness. To meet such needs, liberal theologies and the conventional ecumenism that seem to relativize every religious tradition are not as appealing as many fundamentalist claims (C. Smith et al. 1998). The same forces are also affecting immigrant religions. Given their existential experiences of uprooting and rerooting, new immigrants are hungrier than most other Americans for absolute certainty (F. Yang 1999a).

The return to theological foundations among immigrant religions has some common characteristics with fundamentalism. Obviously, both involve going back to the origins of the religion, that is, to actual or imagined ideal original concepts and conditions. However, as Marty and Appleby (1991) observe, fundamentalists perceive modern culture (i.e., secular rationality, relativism, and individualism) as a threat that

inspires their reaction. They are committed to battling both liberalism in the churches and secularism in society (Shibley 1996). In this sense, fundamentalism is closely associated with traditionalism. In contrast, this reaching toward foundations among immigrant religions can generate liberal or liberating ideas and actions—liberating followers of a religion from stifling cultural traditions and sectarian limitations. Therefore, the Christian Reformation in Europe that called for returning to the roots became the catalyst for the modern socioeconomic system (Weber [1904] 1958); Mahatma Gandhi used many classic Hindu texts to justify and buttress his call for nonviolence (Rudolph and Rudolph 1967); and “Protestant Buddhists” in Sri Lanka claim that the Buddha was the first great scientist (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988).

Moreover, returning to theological foundations among immigrant religions is often ecumenical within a religion—that is, the process unites groups that vary in ideology, ethnicity, and national origin. It provides the theological foundation for social inclusiveness, to which we now turn.

## INCLUDING OTHER PEOPLES

Adopting congregational forms and theological changes toward emphasizing the original grand tradition over more recent subtraditions are accompanied by increasing inclusiveness in membership. Immigrant religious communities are generally moving from particularism to greater universalism in membership. This is the third process we observe in the transformation of immigrant religions in the United States.

Depending on the nature of membership, religions may be distinguished as world, national, and ethnic religions. All three categories of immigrant religions are expanding their membership boundaries. Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam are world religions that have believers in many countries. While believers in a world religion hold universal ideals that are open to all people, “universality becomes concrete only when the emigrant moves from an ethnic region to an area that is both ethnically and religiously pluralistic” (Williams 1988:13). Coming to the cosmopolitan metropolis in the United

States, Buddhism and Islam are incorporating people of diverse ethnic and national backgrounds, as well as people of various subtraditions of those religions. Some national religions, such as Hinduism in India, are composed of many ethnic and regional groups that practice the religion according to local traditions. In the United States, Hinduism is expanding to include diverse Hindu subtraditions (Kurien 1998; Williams 1988). Hindu temples, like the one we studied in Houston, have members from many states of India. To accommodate this diversity, the temple incorporates deities from the various regions, is thus attended by people from various Indian states, and is also attended by a few non-Indian Americans as well. Chinese and Vietnamese Buddhist temples and Muslim mosques have also expanded their memberships to receive people of various ethnic backgrounds, including native-born Americans.

Likewise, many immigrant Christian churches are incorporating people from diverse national origins. The Chinese Gospel Church in Houston, for example, originally consisted of Cantonese-speaking and Mandarin-speaking Chinese from Hong Kong and Taiwan. However, gradually it began to reach out to include among its members Chinese from mainland China and Southeast Asian countries, U.S.-born Chinese, and non-Chinese Vietnamese, Korean, and Euro-Americans. Similarly, in an effort to be more inclusive, the Argentine evangelical church in Houston is accommodating the increasing numbers of Mexicans and Central Americans that seek membership in the church. Several previously all-Anglo churches are also struggling to incorporate increasing numbers of non-Anglos who are moving into their neighborhoods. St. Catherine's, a suburban working-class Catholic parish in Houston, has seven ethnic groups that constitute "Catholic Communities" in the church, while the Southwest Assembly of God is a nearby Protestant evangelical church whose membership includes people of 48 nationalities speaking 59 different languages.

Warner (1993) states that when a critical mass of the national, regional, linguistic, religious, or other grouping is absent, "solidarity groups may be broader in recruitment but

thinner in commitment" (p. 1062). However, broad inclusiveness in membership does not necessarily mean weak commitment to that religion. Often, this inclusiveness is accompanied by the process of returning to theological foundations. By following what is believed to be a foundational and pure form of the religion, followers claim that they now have a better understanding of their religion. Within American social and cultural contexts, many immigrants in such inclusive religious communities claim that their religiosity has been increased and purified, representing a return to the true spirit of the religion in its original roots.

Social inclusiveness is occurring even in smaller ethnic religions, or what Williams (1988) calls sectarian religions. For example, Zoroastrianism has been an ethnic religion for people who trace their ancestry to Persia. Zoroastrians do not routinely proselytize. Zoroastrian traditionalists even believe that departure from the religion of one's birth and conversion to a different faith is spiritually sinful and biologically degrading. However, the Zoroastrian Association of Houston has been seriously discussing the acceptance of converts, a practice that is largely prompted by intermarriages. Some non-Persian spouses and the children of such marriages desire to become full participants in the Zoroastrian community. Zoroastrian inclusionists justify their position of accepting converts by referring to the original words of Zoroaster as recorded in the *Gathas*, which clearly calls for spreading the faith among all peoples of the world (Rustomji 2000). The increase of intermarriages is an immigrant phenomenon in America and challenges ethnic or sectarian religions to expand their memberships. Within a Zoroastrian community of about 400 members in Houston, there are approximately 40 interreligious couples. Therefore, despite objections by some traditionalists, expanding boundaries seems inevitable if Zoroastrianism is to survive in America.

In addition, almost all immigrant religions have gained converts of native-born Americans, including whites and blacks. Not only have the proselytizing religions such as Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism received converts, some nonproselytizing religions such as Sikhism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism,

and Hinduism have also attracted American followers who are fascinated by meditation, vegetarianism, or beliefs regarding nonviolence. We find that even the Yoruba religion, which originated in western Africa and was brought to the United States by Cuban immigrants, has followers of many ethnic backgrounds: Cubans, Mexicans, Dominicans, Puerto Ricans, Colombians, Salvadorans, Panamanians, Italians, and Anglos. All Yoruba "houses" in Houston are multiethnic (Ebaugh and Curry 2000). Apparently, the presence of religious seekers among native-born Americans is an important factor in the increasing inclusiveness of the immigrant religions. These seekers for alternative religions have increased since the 1960s (Kosmin and Lachman 1993).

An important incentive for immigrant religions to accept nonethnics as members is their desire to enter mainstream America. As we argue elsewhere (Yang and Ebaugh forthcoming), recruiting native-born Americans, especially whites, is especially salient for minority religions (e.g., Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam). This enhances the American appearance of the otherwise alien religion, creating a fast track to Americanization. Interestingly, the few white converts at our Buddhist, Hindu, and Muslim sites are often designated as spokespersons for the religion when dealing with the larger society.

Another incentive for including people outside traditional boundaries is legitimization of a religion for its revival in the home country as well as in the immigrant community. It is not rare to hear Chinese Buddhists make statements like this: Even Americans are becoming Buddhists, so why don't we Chinese appreciate our own Buddhist tradition? Williams (1988) quotes a study of Hare Krishna in India that points out that not only are Asians flattered by Western devotees' conversion to their religion but their confidence in their own religious beliefs and values is reinforced and legitimized by it.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR GLOBAL RELIGIOUS SYSTEMS

The moves in immigrant religions toward congregational forms, theological foundations, and greater social inclusiveness are happening in many immigrant communi-

ties.<sup>8</sup> Certainly, these changes could be regarded as Americanization because they are occurring in the United States in response to the American context—legal ordinances, social norms, and cultural practices. However, they represent more than Americanization: These changes are also taking place in other parts of the world; and the changes in the United States have enabled these immigrant religious communities to exert power within their global religious systems.

First, many of the changes described above have been happening in many regions earlier and without immigrants coming to the United States (Beyer 1998; Bouma and Singleton 2000; Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988; McLellan 1999; Rudolph and Piscatori 1997). For example, in the 1920s, Chinese Buddhists began adopting Christian organizing and social welfare practices in China. Reverend Tai-Xu (1889–1947) was the first advocate for Buddhist institutional modernization (Welch 1968). He dialogued with Christian missionaries in China and visited Europe and America. Patterning Christian ways, he established Buddhist seminaries, developed ministries to prisoners, established charity programs, learned about modern sciences, and so on. Since the 1960s, these modernization efforts, along with reaching back to theological roots, have been carried out full scale in Taiwan, exemplified in the influential Fo Kuang Shan (Buddha Light Mountain) system and the Tzu Chi Benevolent Association. It is important to note that Buddhists see such changes not as Americanization or Christianization, but as modernization—accommodating to modern social environments in order to reconstruct the purified religion in modern society.

Second, the changes occurring in the United States may be transportable to other parts of the world, including Third World countries that are undergoing modernization.

<sup>8</sup> Some recent immigrant religious groups may not be experiencing such changes. Because of the great diversity of immigrant religions, their varied social and cultural backgrounds, and their varied geographic and social locations in American society, some immigrant religious groups have managed to resist these changes. However, we think these cases are rare.



The religious and cultural changes in immigrant communities have political and religious impacts on the home country (Kurien 2001). According to our interviewees, many religious leaders in the home countries are receptive to the argument that the religious transformations are not only effective and necessary in a modern context but also lead to a purer form of the religion. Even greater social inclusiveness is transportable to many Third World countries. Global market economies are producing mass migrations of workers within and across nation-state borders (Sassen 1988), resulting in ethnic and religious pluralism in many areas of the world. For example, Hong Kong has become an international city in which most members of most religious communities are immigrants and their children. Singapore receives a variety of immigrants in addition to the Chinese, Indians, and Malays that constitute its majority population. There are also increasing numbers of Southeast Asians, Russians, Europeans, and Americans working and living in metropolitan areas of China. Given the cosmopolitan environment and other social contexts similar to those of the United States, religious changes in one place may easily spread to other parts of the world.

Based on the study of immigrant religions in the United States, it is apparent that some immigrant religious communities are forming the worldwide organizational center of their respective religions in the United States. Immigrant religions usually have their holy centers in other parts of the world. When people emigrate, they move away from the foundational or social-historical center of their religion. However, immigrants in the United States, the core country in the contemporary world-system, possess rich resources, including material wealth, advanced technologies, organizational skills, and live in one of the world's most advanced societies. Immigrant religious communities in the United States are in a powerful position to exert influence in their countries of origin and possibly in other parts of the world as well. For example, while Israel or Jerusalem remains the holy center of Judaism, the United States has become an important organizational and resource center of Judaism.

Among the new immigrants we studied, the Zoroastrians present a similar case.

Without housing the original Zoroastrian flame, which is in Iran and India and difficult to transport over the sea, the United States cannot become the holy center of Zoroastrianism. However, immigrant Zoroastrians with their advanced technologies have established Internet e-mail lists that have provided unprecedented forums to discuss Zoroastrianism and link the worldwide Zoroastrian community. Moreover, given its organizational and material resources, the Houston Zoroastrian community organized a World Zoroastrian Congress held in Houston in 2000 through which American Zoroastrians hoped to unite all Zoroastrians in the world.

In the same fashion, many Buddhist sects or denominations have established organizational bases in the United States. For example, the Fo Kuang Shan, which originated in Taiwan, has established Hsi Lai Temple near Los Angeles. Hsi Lai Temple not only serves as the headquarters for the branch temples in North America, but also functions as a base to reach Buddhists in various countries and to organize international Buddhist events. It would be much more difficult for them to organize events in Taiwan, a diplomatically isolated island.

Interestingly, some sectarian or cultic groups in the Third World countries look to the United States for increasing their membership and influence. A Christian cult in China proclaims that the United States is the worldly place closest to heaven; when Christ comes again, Christians will be gathered in the United States before being forever raised into heaven. Falun Gong, a new Chinese religion with Buddhist flavors, has made it a priority to convert European descendants (whites) in North America and Australia while continuing its rapid expansion among the Chinese worldwide. Li Hongzhi, the founder of Falun Gong, first made some itinerant preaching tours to the United States and Australia in the mid-1990s, and then settled in New York City. The talks given in Australia and America were used by his followers to boost the spread of the cult within China. From New York City, through the Internet and phone connections, Li is exerting greater influence on his followers in China, who have been challenging the authorities' suppression there.

The transnational impacts of religious immigrants in the United States are possible because of the influence of the United States as the core country in the world-system, the tangible and intangible resources of contemporary immigrants, and the social and cultural experiences of immigrants living in modern pluralist America. Because some religions have their holy center geographically fixed, the United States cannot become the center but perhaps could become one of a number of multiple functional centers throughout the world, as Beyer (1994) argues. The three processes described here—adopting congregational forms, returning to theological foundations, and striving to include other peoples—characterize immigrant religions in the United States. They provide immigrants with experiences and resources that enable them to exert leadership in attempting to maintain doctrinal purity, influence organizational affairs within the religious system, and use their resources to spread the faith. However, to examine the transnational networks of immigrant religions and to assess the global impacts of the religious transformations happening in the United States, we need further research in the immigrant home countries and other parts of the world.

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