Transcending Borders: Using Regional and Ethnographic Studies to Envision the Future of Humanistic Buddhism

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"I have seen the Pure Land. It is the land of no boundaries."
—Ellison Onizuka[1]

Ellison Onizuka (1946-1986) made this observation upon viewing the Earth from Space Shuttle Discovery in 1985. A National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) astronaut, Onizuka became the first Asian-American and the first Buddhist to reach space. Raised as a Shin Buddhist in Hawaii affiliated with the Kona Hongwanji[2], Onizuka was struck by the lack of boundaries or borders—political, racial, or egoistic—visible from such a distance.

Onizuka's vision of the Pure Land is consonant with Venerable Master Hsing Yun's teaching that the Pure Land can be created here and now. Although Onizuka's space shuttle escaped the Earth's atmosphere, his space explorations were still part of the Sahā world. He was on the ill-fated space shuttle Challenger in January, 1985 when it exploded right after take-off, killing all seven people on board. We shall return to Onizuka's insight into the essence of the borderless Pure Land at the end of this paper.

In his dissertation on the Fo Guang Shan Hsi Lai Temple, S. Kuo characterizes Fo Guang Shan as 1) affirming the value of action in this world; 2) deeply rooted in orthodox Buddhist traditions; and 3) providing continuity between past and future, particularly for those Asian Buddhists living in the United States who view themselves as Buddhists in diaspora.[3] Judith Nagata's

1 R. Kobata, "Sensei's Message," *Newsletter—Buddhist Church of San Francisco,* 2017. [Online] Buddhist Church of San Francisco. Available at: https://www.buddhistchurchofsanfrancisco.org.

2 Ibid.

3 S. Kuo, "Situating Themselves in the Pure Land of Humanistic Buddhism on Earth—A Study of Chinese American Religiosity at Hsi Lai Temple in Southern California" (PhD diss., University of California Riverside, 2018) 11-12.

1999 study includes a fourth characteristic: 4) the laicization of many aspects of lived religion. These include pursuit of deep knowledge of Buddhist scriptures, gender equality, and ethnic identity.[4] Venerable Hui Dong, Abbot of the Hsi Lai Temple, adds that 5) Chinese culture is a central part of the temple's mission.[5] As we shall see, other humanistic forms of Buddhism do not necessarily rest upon—or exclude—Chinese culture, so this paper examines ethnic culture in general as the fifth component. These five characteristics are integral to Fo Guang Shan and, this paper will argue, the future of Humanistic Buddhism in Arizona.

Arizona is a region where the population of Chinese Buddhists is low and the general populations of both Asian-Americans and Buddhists are small. Thus Buddhist communities find themselves not only distant from large centers of Buddhism in California, but also isolated from each other. A study of two very different approaches to Buddhism in Arizona may shed light on the future of Humanistic Buddhism (literally "Buddhism in the midst of people") in similarly sparsely populated regions of the United States.

Background and Methodological Approach

As faculty at the University of Arizona in southeastern Arizona, we are keenly aware of the boundaries, borders, and barriers that separate people from one another. The campus was built in 1885 on land originally inhabited by the indigenous people of the Tohono O'odham Nation. The Tohono O'odham reservation

4 Judith Nagata, "The Globalisation of Buddhism and the Emergence of Religious Civil Society: The Case of the Taiwanese Fo Kuang Shan Movement in Asia and the West," *Communal/Plural* 7.2 (1999): 231-48.

5 Hui Dong, "How to Deal with the Upheavals in Life from the Buddhist Perspective," Center for Buddhist Studies, University of Arizona, September 17, 2019.

includes land on both sides of the Arizona-Mexico border. U.S.-Mexico foreign relations impact residents daily. Tucson is also home to many people of Latin American heritage. The University of Arizona recently earned the designation "Hispanic Serving Institution" (2018) due to the number of Hispanic students attending.

Tucson has a long, complex history of Chinese immigration interwoven with its Spanish speaking community. Cross-border migration of Chinese between Tucson and Mexico began in the 20th century, stabilizing in the 1960s as conditions in both areas shifted. The overlapping Chinese-American and Chinese-Mexican-American communities in Tucson continue to flourish. In addition, the university attracts both international Chinese students and Chinese-American students, increasing the population of ethnic Chinese in Tucson.

My current ethnographic research in Buddhist studies focuses on Buddhism in Arizona, specifically in Pima County where Tucson is located. As Jeff Wilson has demonstrated, regional variations in the United States can heavily impact ways that Buddhism is practiced: "places in their local and regional specificity—not just their national and transnational generality and connection—need to be more closely attended to by scholars of Buddhism beyond Asia."[6] Although this paper begins by positing a globally "borderless" world as the Buddhist ideal, it takes a regionalist approach to understanding some of the obstacles to achieving that ideal. What can an examination of Buddhism in Tucson, Arizona teach us about the future of Humanistic Buddhism?

Factor One: Population

From 2000 to 2010, the Asian population of California increased by 34%, to become almost 15% of the total population.

6 J. Wilson, *Dixie Dharma* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014) 4.

By contrast, the Asian population of Arizona increased by a whopping 95% (almost doubling), to become only 3.6% of the total population.[7] The 2020 U.S. Census will open a window on changes in both states over the most recent ten years.[8] Although this data demonstrates the tremendous difference in size between the two states' Asian populations, it is only one piece of the puzzle of Buddhism in Arizona.

According to the latest population data from Pima County, Arizona, Tucson is the most densely populated part of Pima County, but there are many rural residents, and at least three Buddhist sanghas, located outside the city limits. The total population of Pima County is 980,263, of which 77% is white, 42.9% Hispanic (there is some overlap between white and Hispanic), 3.5% Black, 3.5% American Indian, and 2.9% Asian. The Chinese population alone is 0.8%.[9]

Naturally, not everyone of Asian descent in Pima County is a Buddhist, nor are all Buddhists in Pima County Asian. Local Buddhist communities include almost all ethnicities, with the possible (though not well documented) exception of American Indian. The above data are included for comparison with Fo Guang Shan communities world-wide.

The number of Buddhists in Pima County is difficult to determine. Religious affiliation is usually counted by congregation and official membership. Fewer than twenty Buddhist groups meet regularly in Tucson. Of these, six identify with Japanese

7 Hoeffel, Rastogi, Kim, and Shahid, "The Asian Population: 2010," United States Census Bureau, March 2012, available at https://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-11.pdf.

8 The national census is taken every ten years, providing data on the local, county, state, and national levels.

9 As of 2017. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates*. U.S. Department of Commerce, 2017.

Zen lineages; one with Vipassana; five with various schools of Vajrayana Buddhism; one Soka Gakkai congregation; two separate and unaffiliated Thiền (Vietnamese) lineages; and four Thai Theravada wats.[10] Most of these groups do not maintain membership rolls beyond donation records. Some experience major shifts in attendance from week to week, but do not keep attendance records.

Five of the local groups are small enough that they do not have their own buildings. The Tucson Community Meditation Center, founded in 1980, rents space to the Tucson Upaya Sangha (a lay Zen practice group), the Japanese Zen Sangha, and the Desert Insight Sangha (Vipassana). The Little Chapel of All Nations rents space to the Sky Island Zen group (Soto) and the Desert Rain Zen Sangha (Diamond Sangha, a lay sangha founded in Hawaii). However, there is little overlap among the groups meeting in either center, nor do they mingle with other (non-Buddhist) groups meeting in those centers.

Of the Tibetan groups, only two have temples with traditional architecture. The New Kadampa school recently built a temple and keeps membership records, as they charge a monthly membership fee as well as non-member fees for all events. The other Tibetan communities—Shambhala (Kagyu), Drikung Dzogchen (Kagyu), Awam/Rime (Nyingma), and the Bodhisattva Institute (Gelug)—have their own locations, in most cases a house, the Awam/Rime renting a space in a shopping center.

Soka Gakkai has its own building and parking lot. Parking is a problem for many Buddhist groups in Tucson; neighbors do not appreciate large numbers of cars occupying street parking. Congregants are urged to park some blocks away.

The two Thiền temples are small but ornate. Minh Dang Quang temple follows the practices of Thich Nhat Hanh. The

10 A Theravada *wat* is a monastery, typically attached to a temple, with a surrounding lay community.

Dharma Flower Temple combines Pure Land practices with esoteric Buddhism, common in Vietnam. Temple membership rarely overlaps, and members interviewed at each had not heard of the other. Two of the four Theravada wats are highly decorated, the others situated in residential houses. The wats keep records of donations, but not of membership or attendance.

Factor Two: Culture, Ethnicity, and Language

It is said that the Zen community in Tucson is both white-skinned and white-haired. Tucson is home to many retirees, so it is not surprising that some Buddhist congregations are comprised of members 55 years old and above, but this is an overgeneralization. Zen groups that meet near the university campus include many students of differing ethnicities.[11] One of the Tibetan groups includes members of the local Tibetan community. While the majority of teachers and organizers are white, all ethnicities are welcome, and there are some Hispanic, Black, and a very few Asian members of these groups.

Strikingly, the public faces and resident teachers of most of the Zen and Vajrayana groups in Tucson are white, as are the majority of their congregants. The Thiền temples do not have any "public faces" outside the Vietnamese community;[12] neither do they advertise their presence to non-Vietnamese. At the best-known Thai temple, Wat Buddhametta, the public face is the Ajahn (abbot), who is Thai.

Language is another factor separating Buddhist groups in Tucson. This can make it difficult to locate Buddhist groups that do not offer events in English, as they are not part of the online "Tucson Buddhism Network," and some lack an online presence

11 Note: there are currently no Buddhist groups in Tucson with Chinese lineages.

12 In fact, Vietnamese Americans new to Tucson learn of the temples' existence and locations by word of mouth alone.

completely. Wat Buddhametta, as described below in Case Study 2, is the only Buddhist organization in Tucson that offers events and services in multiple languages for its ethnically diverse membership.

The Thiền temples hold cultural events and religious ones. They offer a home-away-from-home like the California Hsi Lai Temple does for Chinese Americans. All services and events are in Vietnamese; while those of other ethnicities are welcome, the language that makes Vietnamese in diaspora feel at home becomes a barrier to Buddhists who speak other languages.

The fragmentation among the Buddhist groups in Tucson transcends matters of belief and practice, due to differing language and cultural needs. As Kuo has noted, finding a home that feels familiar in an otherwise unfamiliar environment is one of the critical roles that the Hsi Lai Temple fills for southern California Chinese Buddhists. In Tucson this function is performed by some temples for targeted immigrant communities, making those temples virtually inaccessible to non-members. On the other hand, Asian-Americans fluent in English may feel uncomfortable attending rituals at temples where they are surrounded by white faces, even if the tradition is the one with which they personally affiliate. The divisions between "Asian American Buddhism" and "European American Buddhism," or "immigrant Buddhism" and "convert Buddhism" in Tucson are complex and multi-faceted.

Factor Three: Location

"Every Buddhist sits, chants, or reads in a specific place and is impacted by that place in ways we may be able to discern, as well as others that escape us."[13] In Pima County, the size and usage of a Buddhist group's meeting space may heavily affect practice. Those small groups without temples or homes of their own, such

13 Wilson, *Dixie Dharma*, 11.

as those that meet at the Little Chapel of All Nations or the Tucson Community Meditation Center, might wish to join with each other for major celebrations like Lunar New Year, but their meeting times are constrained by other (non-Buddhist) groups' use of the facilities. Some of them meet only for meditation and Dharma talks, significantly de-ritualizing their Buddhist practice.

Although the two Thiền temples[14] are well attended and have active members, their celebrations of major Buddhist festivals such as the Lunar New Year are minimal, carried out primarily by monastics due to the small size of their temples. Instead, the entire Vietnamese community comes together to celebrate at the larger of the two local Vietnamese churches, Our Lady of La Vang (Catholic), which is able to accommodate such a crowd. The celebration is a mixture of Buddhist and Catholic observances so that everyone feels welcome. Once again, this results in a de-ritualization of Buddhist practice among those who do not attend their home temple for such events.

Special Note: The Chinese in Tucson

The first Chinese to settle in Tucson were three men surnamed Wong who arrived in the early 1860s. The extension of the Southern Pacific Railroad into Arizona in the 1870s brought more Chinese from California, as did the more tolerant social climate of Arizona. The 1880 Census records 159 Chinese in Tucson.[15] After the completion of the railroad, many Chinese became store owners

14 Between the time that this paper was written and published, the Covid-19 pandemic has forced both the temples discussed here to put their gatherings online.

15 Ernesto Portillo, "Neto's Tucson: Rolling History Party Highlights Long-Gone Chinese Markets," *Arizona Daily Star*, September 9, 2012, https://tucson.com/news/local/neto-s-tucson-rolling-history-party-highlights-long-gone- chinese/article_b98a0106-a780-5cb9-b99a-86825f3eda0c.html.

and farmers. Displaying a facility for language learning, Chinese merchants communicated with customers in Spanish and Native American languages.

Not permitted to marry white women, and with laws prohibiting more Chinese from entering the U.S., some Tucsonan Chinese men married Mexican women. Conversion to Catholicism often followed. Protestant Christian missions were established and drew in even more Chinese members. Living together in the barrio, speaking each other's languages, and viewed as outsiders by the white majority, Tucsonan Chinese and Mexicans supported each other in an often-hostile society.[16]

Yet the "joss house," as non-Chinese called it, remained an integral fixture for the Tucsonan Chinese. With no officiating religious specialist, this was the place where Chinese still performed rituals for their ancestors and observed important festivals. Regardless of church affiliation, the Chinese of Tucson maintained their connection to their culture and religion.[17] For funerals, the *huiguan* 會館 associations either arranged for the deceased to be returned to his hometown in China, or performed the funeral rituals themselves as lay practitioners.

Tucsonan Chinese continue to deeply value their heritage and culture. The Chinese Cultural Center was founded in 2005. It offers programs, classes, and workshops on Chinese culture for all ages, filling cultural needs of Chinese American Tucsonans and educating the public about Chinese culture. Major events include Chinese New Year, Qing Ming, and Autumn Moon celebrations.

16 Chia-Lin Pao Tao, "Contributions of Chinese-American Women in the West: The Case of E.T. of Arizona," *Chinese Studies in History* 34, no. 3 (2001): 10–20, doi:10.2753/csh0009-4633340310.

17 Anthony J. Davis, "The Orientation of Tucson's Chinese," *Tucson Citizen,* April 21, 1979, 12-14.

Many ethnic Chinese also attend Chinese New Year and Autumn Moon celebrations at the Tucson Chinese Christian Church, one of three Chinese churches in Tucson.

Case Studies: Characteristics of Humanistic Buddhism in Two Tucson Buddhist Communities

Kuo emphasizes the role of the Hsi Lai temple in providing ritualized actions performed in a Buddhist space.[18] He explains the need for ritual and doctrine and also a "familiar framework" in which Chinese Americans and Chinese immigrants can find a spiritual home in fast-paced America. Kuo's work shows "how modern Chinese Buddhism has transplanted its systems of doctrine and practice in the United States, and how those systems as well as their participants have undergone a transformation in response to their American circumstances."[19]

Using the five characteristics of Humanistic Buddhism laid out in the introduction to this paper (1) affirming the value of action in this world; 2) deeply rooted in orthodox Buddhist traditions; 3) providing continuity between past and future; 4) the laicization of many aspects of lived religion; and 5) the integration of cultural elements), we will examine contemporary practices of two Buddhist groups in Tucson, Pima County, Arizona. These case studies present well-established groups that do not overtly identify with the term "Humanistic Buddhism," yet exemplify it in different ways, overcoming the barriers to practice described above.

Case Study 1: The Zen Desert Sangha

Founded in 1982 by eight Zen Buddhist converts, the Zen

18 Kuo, "Situating Themselves in the Pure Land of Humanistic Buddhism on Earth—A Study of Chinese American Religiosity at Hsi Lai Temple in Southern California," 10.

19 Ibid, 10.

Desert Sangha (ZDS) is the second oldest continuous Buddhist practice with a formal lineage in Pima County. The community affiliates with the Diamond Sangha, a Hawaiian sangha founded in 1959 by Robert and Anne Aitken. ZDS traces its lineage to both Hakuin Ekaku and Dogen, blending Rinzai and Soto practices in the Harada-Yasutani tradition. ZDS operates as a democratic lay sangha.

ZDS has a membership of around thirty lay people practicing with a resident teacher. Membership entails six months of participation, a commitment to the sangha, and a financial contribution. Other forms of contribution are acceptable from members in straitened circumstances. Almost all of the current members are of white (European) ethnicity and came to Buddhism from another religious background or from none. Hence the blanket term "Buddhist convert," although this can apply to any ethnicity.[20] A few Hispanic and Asian members also participate in ZDS. Some members maintain connections to their Jewish or Christian roots, so the term "convert" does not apply precisely.[21] The first teacher to serve at ZDS (1989-2011), Pat Hawk Roshi, was a Roman Catholic priest as well as a Zen teacher and Dharma heir of Robert Aitken.

ZDS maintains a traditional, yet Americanized, ritual and meditation practice. Regular Dharma talks, temple work sessions, and day-long zazenkai make up the majority of the community's calendar, with a seasonal temple work practice to which families are invited. The primary focus is on adults rather than children,

20 Cf. Russell Jeung, "Secularization and Asian Americans." in *Asian American Religious Cultures,* vol. 1 by Jonathan H.X. Lee, et al. (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2015): 136-145

21 Mae Lee Sun, "The Faces of Buddhism in Tucson," *The Tucson Weekly,* July 12, 2007, http://www.buddhistchannel.tv/index.php?id=64,4465,0,0,1,0#.XYqSkShKg2w.

individual development rather than family rituals, though non-members are welcomed. Pat Hawk Roshi explained that, "People practicing Buddhism need to be surrounded by support... because it is a very difficult path and not at all attractive or colorful."[22] While the ZDS rooms and garden might not be colorful, they are simple and beautiful, lovingly maintained and welcoming to one who may feel overwhelmed by the bustle and noise of life in a big city. Japanese design elements such as the wood floor and empty walls of the zendo, along with statues and paintings of the bodhisattva Kannon, create a tranquil environment.

Pat Hawk Roshi taught that the integral aspects of Buddhist practice be maintained despite its relatively new home in Tucson. "If Buddhism tries too hard to accommodate American needs, like getting rid of devotional practices, rituals and the tradition of working with a teacher—it will lose its fundamental purpose."[23] Yet ZDS does make accommodations to the Tucson lifestyle. Most events are scheduled for early morning or early evening, taking advantage of cooler weather in the desert and permitting members employed during business hours to attend regularly. The American emphasis on democratic process gives all members a say in matters pertaining to the sangha while still leaving matters of wisdom to resident and visiting teachers. Holding all events and sits in English[24] marks ZDS as a "homemade" American Buddhist community compared with so-called "immigrant-originated" Buddhist communities.

ZDS cooperates with other Zen sanghas to invite teachers from other parts of the country. Communal sesshins and week-long

22 Mae Lee Sun, "The Faces of Buddhism in Tucson," *The Tucson Weekly,* July 12, 2007, http://www.buddhistchannel.tv/index.php?id=64,4465,0,0,1,0#.XYqSkShKg2w.

23 Ibid.

24 With some traditional chanting in Japanese.

retreats are more financially feasible for combined lay sanghas. While a small group cannot afford the travel costs of Zen teachers such as Norman Fischer, the combined resources of all the Zen groups can raise the funds.[25] All six Zen sanghas as well as university students, staff, and faculty benefitted from this teacher's visit in 2018.

What can we learn from the Zen Desert Sangha about humanism in Buddhism? Returning to the five characteristics of the Hsi Lai Temple, ZDS affirms the value of action in this world, incorporating *samu* (work practice) as a community activity. ZDS is deeply rooted in orthodox Buddhism, which provides some continuity between past and future, in honoring their lineage and founders as well as upholding the rigorous practices laid out by Robert Aitken and Pat Hawk. ZDS has also laicized all but the wisdom teaching aspect of lived religion, allowing for the pursuit of deep knowledge and gender equality among lay practitioners. ZDS does not incorporate ethnic or cultural elements in its traditions; the sangha's embracing of its Japanese lineage is almost overtaken by the very American method of turning almost all matters over to the members themselves. What began in necessity (a lack of other local sanghas and religious specialists) has become a small but vibrant tradition. While the Zen Desert Sangha has not demonstrated growth above thirty members, it has managed to persist in the otherwise fragmented and isolated Buddhist landscape of Tucson.

Case 2: Wat Buddhametta

The Thai/Lao population of Pima County consists of approx. 150 families. Four closely-affiliated Thai Theravada wats serve the community. The first monastery, Wat Dhammarataranam, was

25 With additional funding from the Center for Buddhist Studies at the University of Arizona (cbs.arizona.edu).

founded in the late 1970s to provide spiritual guidance to Lao and Thai refugees fleeing the upheavals in Southeast Asia. This wat continues to offer regular services in Thai and Lao, with Pāḷi for rituals.

Each of the four wats has a particular focus. Wat Dhammarataranam has the largest facility, but is a distance outside Tucson, so the most devoted orthodox Theravada Buddhists make their homes near it. Another *wat* serves the Lao community, while a third functions primarily as a monastery. This paper will concentrate on a fourth, Wat Buddhametta. Wat Buddhametta is distinctive for its location, functions, and membership. Approximately 25 Thai families make up the core of the lay community. Membership is defined through active participation in the Theravada sangha-lay relationship: providing food and robes for the monks, helping with upkeep of the *wat*, and relying on the sangha for traditional teachings, rituals, and blessings.

"Non-committed members" are an integral part of the lay community. Most are native-born Americans, majority white and Hispanic. Eight monks ordained at Thai Buddhist universities live at Wat Buddhametta, as do the Ajahn (Abbot) and the Anagārika (a monk not yet ordained). A Maechi (a laywoman who has taken the vow and lives an ascetic, celibate life) is considered part of the sangha and lives nearby. Both the Anagārika and the Maechi are white American converts to Buddhism.

The Ajahn was ordained at age fifteen and came to Pima County in 1999 when there was only one wat. He immediately set out to gain fluency in English. Over the next five years, he developed a series of meditation classes offered at public libraries and participated in the annual Tucson Meet Yourself festival to increase public familiarity with robed monks. Wat Buddhametta, another step toward the Ajahn's vision, opened in 2000 in a central location.

Wat Buddhametta's calendar is designed to meet the tradi-

tional ritual needs of the lay members as well as those of the larger, non-committed community. The *wat* is open to the public every day except when there is a funeral. Food donations twice in the morning are the most frequent times that Thai members visit—an opportunity for informal interaction and blessing. The daily evening Pāḷi chanting is also a popular time. Important Thai events include the Buddhist Memorial Month, the New Year celebration (on January 1), and the New Robe Offering. These are always attended by the Thai members, with both Thai and English used if there are English-speakers present. Weddings, birth blessings, funerals, guidance, and special blessings are the most commonly performed personal rituals and services.

Additionally, the *wat* offers weekly chanting, meditation, Dharma talks, and a Buddhist Study Class, all designed for non-committed members and taught in English. Whether these classes result in converts to Buddhism, the Ajahn emphasizes that this service is part of the *wat*'s mission of compassion to the community. "Some people," he acknowledges, "are not ready yet to become Buddhist, but if they practice the bowing and learn giving, they will begin the path to selflessness."[26] We hear in this an echo of Venerable Master Hsing Yun's admonishment that, "although cultivation in this life can in no way result in liberation, there is an initial point of contact for fruition sometime in the future."[27] Few Thai members attend these weekly classes, with the majority of attendants being white and Hispanic.

Both members and non-committed members are attracted to two monthly events. The Full Moon Meditation draws an ethnically diverse crowd. Even more popular is the Community Thai Buffet; a $10 fee is charged to those who did not cook. Eating together

26 Interview with Ajahn (Abbot) Sarayut, 2019.

27 Stuart Chandler, *Establishing a Pure Land on Earth: The Foguang Buddhist Perspective on Modernization and Globalization* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004), 28.

breaks down language barriers; spending informal time with the sangha helps new-comers become familiar with the monks. This is also, the Ajahn notes, a model for teaching the reciprocal sangha/lay relationship. Witnessing first-hand both dana and blessings is a more helpful lesson than a lecture.

Outreach to the Arizona community sometimes requires the Ajahn or another monk to travel four hours to Yuma to minister to Buddhist prisoners at the Arizona State Penitentiary, or, more frequently to the federal prison closer to Tucson. The Ajahn is also registered as a Buddhist chaplain for all hospitals in Pima County. Additional outreach includes offering food and a place to sleep for homeless youth, space permitting.

Wat Buddhametta participates in interfaith events with Jewish, Christian, and Muslim congregations. Asked if they work with any of the other Buddhist groups in Pima County, the Ajahn shook his head. "We have no connection with the Tibetan or Zen Buddhists in Tucson," he said. "I know some of the leaders, but we do not have much in common. They aren't from Asia."[28]

Yet Asian ethnicity is not integral to Wat Buddhametta's goals. "Non-committed members are people who don't like to label themselves, or maybe they still have many family obligations," the Ajahn explained.[29] Because most non-committed members did not grow up with Buddhism, the structure of the sangha/lay relationship is off-putting to them. Therefore, a slow introduction, adapted to the independent American sensibility, works well. The traditional 5-hour Sunday morning service, for example, was shortened to 1.5 hours and is heavily attended.

The Ajahn already has a 20-year plan in place for the *wat.* Expansion of the small facility to offer weekend and temporary monastic retreats is the next goal, after which living space for more Maechis and Anagārikas will be added. The aging Thai/Lao

28 Interview with Ajahn (Abbot) Sarayut, 2019.

29 Ibid.

membership is dwindling, so more adaptations and new strategies are needed to attract new members. It is easiest to learn how to be a Buddhist by beginning very young, according to the Ajahn, so the wat offers a class for children 5-8 years old. Wat Buddhametta is an experiment in which the Ajahn finds himself training his monks to adapt without sacrificing the Dharma.

What can we learn from Wat Buddhametta about humanism in Arizonan Buddhism? Like the Zen Desert Sangha, the *wat* fulfills all but one of the five characteristics of the Hsi Lai Temple. Unlike ZDS, Wat Buddhametta has not laicized any aspects of its practice. Ritual practice is deeply rooted in orthodox Buddhism, though it provides continuity between past and future by adapting traditional Theravada practice to the needs of the Tucson community. The *wat* incorporates a strong ethnic component to its traditions, fulfilling a deep need for the aging immigrant population raised with Thai ritual and language. Finally, Wat Buddhametta deeply affirms the value of action in this world by compassionate works benefitting Buddhists and non-Buddhists inside and outside of Tucson.

Conclusion: The Future of Humanistic Buddhism in Arizona

In parts of the United States with small Asian-American and Buddhist populations, while Humanistic Buddhism is not formally established, the potential may yet be realized. Close study of practices at the Zen Desert Sangha and Wat Buddhametta demonstrate that each group exemplifies critical elements of Humanistic Buddhism that characterize practice at the Hsi Lai Temple.

Some of the obstacles to developing a fully Humanistic Buddhist practice, community, and lasting organization in Tucson include the small Asian and Buddhist populations, the lack of meeting spaces and finances, and the great physical distance from large centers of Buddhist practice in the U.S. The Zen Desert Sangha huddles in its small home, strictly maintaining discipline by holding to orthodox Zen lay practices that do not attract many non-

members. Wat Buddhametta has done the opposite, forging ahead despite lack of funding to make a spiritual home for people with disparate needs. Southern Arizona is a place "where practitioners are relatively isolated from the American Buddhist strongholds in the North and West and must work together in order to maintain a presence on the landscape."[30] However, there is little coming together among the Buddhist communities in Tucson, Arizona.

In his biography of Venerable Master Hsing Yun, Shanker Thapa notes that, "The entire life of the Buddha can be characterized by his spirit of liberating all beings without exclusion."[31] By "coming west" (西來) the Hsi Lai Temple has achieved these five elements for the Chinese-American Buddhists of southern "California. Venerable Hui Dong, in a recent visit to the University of Arizona, expressed the importance of outreach to non-Buddhists, going so far as to claim that, "You don't even have to call it Buddhism"[32] lest the label alienate potential members. Venerable Master Hsing Yun himself has broken down intra-Buddhist lineage barriers in his outreach work, most notable of which are his efforts to re-establish women's ordination for Theravada and Tibetan lineages, with a triple ordination ceremony at Bodhgaya and another at Fo Guang Shan Temple in Kaohsiung.[33]

"We are all global in that we all have buddha nature."[34] For Buddhists in Arizona to achieve Onizuka's Pure Land vision of an Earth without borders or boundaries, it will be necessary to break attachments to the barriers separating not only Buddhists from non-Buddhists, but within the local Buddhist community as a whole.

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30 Wilson, *Dixie Dharma*, 4.

31 S. Thapa, "Master Hsing Yun of Fo Guang Shan and the development of Humanistic Buddhism," in *Taiwan Today,* ed. A. Sharma and S. Chakrabarti (London: Anthem Press, 2010), 215.

32 Hui Dong, "How to Deal with the Upheavals in Life from the Buddhist Perspective."

33 Chandler, *Establishing a Pure Land on Earth: The Foguang Buddhist Perspective on Modernization and Globalization,* 85-87.

34 Ibid, 304.

Mountains are by nature splendid.
Mountains in paintings are splendid by art.
Mountains in dreams have a ghostly splendor.
But the mind's mountains are the most splendid.

—Humble Table, Wise Fare