

# Aloha with Gassho: Buddhism in the Hawaiian Plantations<sup>1</sup>

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KATSUMI YAMASAKI, A NISEI living in Hawaii in 1930 stated, “In most of the Buddhist temples of Hawaii, Buddhism in its ritual and formula is an exact replica of the system in vogue in Japan.”<sup>2</sup> It seems to be a simple statement, but, in fact, recent advances in scholarship on Japanese religious history show it to be problematic, and we must ask, What kind of Buddhism was transplanted to Hawaii, seemingly without significant change? We now know that precisely at the time of Japanese immigration to Hawaii and California, Buddhism was being radically transformed in each and every aspect ranging from institutional configuration to ritual practice. The Japanese governmental policies separating Buddhist and Shintō groups between 1868 and 1875 in effect created what is now the “modern” Buddhist “tradition,” a tradition that is so thoroughly different from what it had been prior to 1868 that one must seriously question its very name.

When Buddhism came to Hawaii, it came into contact with the Caucasian-dominant society which further altered its appearance, form, and composition. A new “Buddhism” in Hawaii was created, one that David Matsumoto argued was “no longer Japanese but not yet American.”<sup>3</sup> It also becomes unlike that which will be seen on the mainland as well. This new Buddhism still had traces of its heritage from Japan, for Buddhism in Hawaii was still intertwined with Shintō in the minds and hearts of the immigrants. Once in Hawaii, however, it immediately came into contact not only with the dominant Christian society but also the traditions of many others in Hawaii—native Hawaiians, Chinese, Filipinos, and Portuguese.<sup>4</sup> The general spirit of accommodation, of *aloha*, by the Hawaiian monarchy enabled Japanese Buddhism to find its own niche in Hawaii. While initially hesitant over its welcome and later feared because of its strength, Buddhism in Hawaii became the tradition its practitioners needed: one that brought the comfort of the homeland and the dynamic spirit of its new home in the islands.

Although the Japanese *shinbutsu bunri* (Shintō-Buddhist separation) edicts of the late 1800s greatly affected Buddhism and Shintō in Japan, the Buddhism and Shintō imported by Japanese laborers to Hawaii did not seem to be as affected by these laws. As a result, Hawaiian Buddhism and

Shintō became forged more by its existence and interaction in Hawaii. While no one theory can explain Japanese religion in Hawaii, theories such as acculturation,<sup>5</sup> assimilation,<sup>6</sup> Americanization,<sup>7</sup> and cultural pluralism<sup>8</sup> all have roots in the Japanese American religious story. The immigrants' "flexible" approach to religion (i.e., being Buddhist, Shintō, and, in some cases, Christian at the same time) created its own theories. While finding their identity in the islands, the Japanese borrowed from those already there to find their place within the Hawaiian culture.

Ultimately, these theories fall short of completely describing the Buddhism that was created. Buddhism came to Hawaii under great persecution and change. Immediately, it was challenged as "pagan" because it was thought to render the Japanese unable to become true to their new land. Americans and others grouped it with Shintō and questioned Japanese loyalty. Despite this, Buddhism continued to adapt to its new surroundings, taking an active role in defining itself, its people, and its future in the islands. Ties to Buddhism became stronger with the immigrants than it had been in Japan.<sup>9</sup>

The Japanese brought a tradition that was unlike the dominant Christian tradition. As Harry Kitano noted, "Religion, in the American sense of Sunday School attendance, belief in a single faith, and relative intolerance of other faiths, is alien to the Japanese. In general, they are tolerant of all theologies and have not institutionalized religion to the extent that most Americans have."<sup>10</sup> During crises or uncertainty, it was not unusual for the Japanese to participate in many different traditions in order to receive the most blessings or good fortune.

Undoubtedly, the Buddhist church was in flux prior to its arrival in Hawaii and continued to change through its contact with other religions, primarily Christianity, in Hawaii. Because it never completely molded to any of these theories, Buddhism in Hawaii continued to become its own entity, borrowing from Shintō, Christianity, and native Hawaiian culture in order to strengthen and support its tradition and its followers.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Prior to the Meiji era, Shintō and Buddhism had been interrelated by a series of associations of rituals, deities, and beliefs. While Buddhism tended to dominate the relationship, Shintō's association with Buddhism in many ways "validated" this foreign religion's existence in Japan. In general, the leaders saw in Buddhism a way to control the population, and they ruled that all Japanese people must register with a temple in their area, where all family members were listed under the heading and belief system of the father. The people, on the other hand, were attracted to Buddhism because of its rituals and funerary practices. Jōdo Shinshū was especially

popular due to its simple belief system that did not require extensive schooling, meditation, or monetary contributions. Through the long-lasting and systematic interactions that led to the integration of Shintō and Buddhism, a mixed religious life was formed, one that encompassed rituals, deities, and institutions in the minds of the people. The needs of the people were realized by one aspect or another in this system of localized combinations while new ways of looking at life and death were created through these interactions between Shintō and Buddhism.

During the Tokugawa Period, Buddhism had been elevated to the position of a state religion. When the Meiji Restoration started, Buddhism was removed from this position. The government tried to further weaken Buddhist power by enacting the policy of *shinbutsu bunri*. "This withdrew government support from Buddhism and officially ended a syncretism which had existed for centuries."<sup>11</sup> At the same time, however, the xenophobic sentiments first caused by European missionary activities in the sixteenth century, and further fueled by the "black ships" of America fifteen years prior to Meiji, rose to a climax which, paradoxically, took the form of Westernization of Japanese mores. The Japanese people began reinventing themselves. In government, economics, religion, and culture, every aspect of past society was completely re-shaped in order to create a "new" Japan, one that could compete with the rest of the world. Japan started a massive program of industrialization, and factories emerged all over the country. In the cultural sphere, a whole new system based on education, ethics, and an Emperor-based morality was enacted. The Meiji ideologues working in the Bureau of Shintō Affairs hoped Shintō could become a cohesive unit comprising a national hierarchy of shrines, thus creating an orthodoxy which was taught to all in the mandatory educational system. While there were many problems with this approach, the end result was a new focus on Shintō and a bias against Buddhism. Hirochika Nakamaki argued that although the Restoration created a "modern Japan" and *shinbutsu bunri* and *haibutsu kishaku* (the persecution of Buddhism) were seen as symbolic of that change to modern society, there probably wasn't a large change in the religious lives of the people.<sup>12</sup>

As a result of the "rediscovery" of Shintō and reaction against Buddhism, several laws were passed separating Shintō from Buddhism. *Shinbutsu bunri* had, however, a number of unexpected effects. First and foremost, it created a thoroughly new Shintō as a separate, autonomous entity. Many problems emerged with the new "Shintō."

"Shintō" in the Meiji context refers to a very recently developed complex of ideas from various sources whose main defining characteristic was a rejection of Buddhism. However, since Buddhism in Japan had previously been thoroughly integrated with Shintō,

the "Buddhism" that was being rejected was not Buddhism *as it really was* but a Buddhism newly presented as "foreign" and "not-Shintō."<sup>13</sup>

Since Shintō had been the subordinate partner in the relationship, what did the dismantling of these "syncretic Shintō sanctuaries" really entail? All Buddhist images, texts, and priests were removed from the shrines and destroyed. While the government insisted (sometimes after the fact) that this was in no way a persecution of Buddhism, Buddhist temples were ransacked, burned to the ground, and their monks harassed and defrocked. In some anti-Buddhist fiefs, the entire Buddhist community was destroyed. One estimate claimed that over two-thirds of the Buddhist temples in Japan were destroyed over the course of five years. However, this mass destruction was not uniformly distributed in the country. In areas of strong Buddhist support such as the modern Hiroshima prefecture which was a strong Shinshū area, Buddhism fared much better with very little destruction. Because the extermination of Buddhism was not widespread or uniform, the effect of *shinbutsu bunri* on the Japanese people and state varied according to region.

After the early Meiji edicts of *shinbutsu bunri* were passed, with the new emphasis of *haibutsu kishaku*, Shintō and Buddhist deities, practices, and beliefs were irreparably dismantled. Or were they? While in the capital, Edo, and other urban centers, Buddhism was being destroyed and Shintō exalted, how did the rural populations fare? The pro-Shintō factions sent "missionaries" into the rural areas to elevate Shintō practice over Buddhism, but how much of an impact did they have on the people? For instance, in the case of my maternal grandparents (who migrated from rural Tōyama in Western Japan) and the majority of other Buddhists in Hawaii who migrated during this early period, Shintō and Buddhism were still interrelated. While they attended weekly services at the Hongwanji and went to many picnics and other activities sponsored by the Buddhist church, one holiday in particular stands out because it is inherently not Buddhist. Every New Year's Eve while my brother and I were lighting fireworks with my cousins, my aunts, grandmother, and mother were preparing the foods we needed to eat at midnight to purify our bodies and make us strong and blessed for the New Year. Most of these recipes were folk traditions rooted in Shintō. Shortly after midnight, my father would have to take my grandparents to the Shintō shrine near the canal in Honolulu. No one looked askance at their behavior and, indeed, many of my grandparents' friends from the Hongwanji were also at the shrine which was only a few blocks from the temple. This was common practice, also noticed by historians of Hawaiian religions, such as Louise Hunter who stated (only in a footnote!), "Buddhism had been officially divorced from Shintō at the time of the Meiji Restoration in 1868, but the Japanese

continued to profess and to practice both religions simultaneously. Members of the American community, ignorant of both Buddhism and Shintō, had no reason to assume the existence of any clear lines of distinction between the two."<sup>14</sup> While Americans seemed interested in Japanese culture and activities insofar as they could control the immigrant population, the pervasiveness of both Shintō and Buddhism in Hawaii implies that, perhaps, the edicts were not very effective in the minds of the Japanese who came to Hawaii. Since many of the Japanese who ventured from Japan were from the rural areas of Southern and Western Japan where Shinshū belief was strong, how pervasive was this edict of *shinbutsu bunri*? Both Louise Hunter and Dennis Ogawa report that the Americans in Hawaii had difficulty distinguishing between the two faiths of Buddhism and Shintō because the people participated in both at various times of the year.

Buddhism in Hawaii, therefore, looked very different than what was being "created" in Japan. However, after coming in contact with the diverse peoples in Hawaii, it started to look very different from any other Buddhism, even the California version—borrowing from its Hawaiian hosts to create a religion for the Japanese that had a Shintō-Christian-Hawaiian-Buddhist feel.

#### PLANTATION LIFE

Although a lone fisherman landed in Hawaii in 1804 after drifting from Japan, the real immigration of Japanese did not officially occur until 1868 when a hundred fifty immigrants arrived in Honolulu. In order to get hard-working laborers for the Hawaiian plantations, the government recruited rural farmers from Japan's agricultural prefectures.<sup>15</sup> In 1885, nine hundred forty-three laborers arrived and were contracted to work on sugar plantations for three years. They called Hawaii "Tengoku" or "Heaven." As early as 1896 the Japanese were arriving in the islands at the astounding rate of approximately two thousand workers a month.<sup>16</sup> Life was hard on the plantations. The Japanese were dispersed throughout the islands to the various sugar and pineapple plantations. Salaries were low and morale quickly declined. These new immigrants realized that the "land of Tengoku" had a lot of hard labor and very little gold.<sup>17</sup>

The Japanese who came during this time had several things in common. Those who came to Hawaii with a three-year contract planned to earn substantial amounts of money in Hawaii and return home; therefore, they never intended to remain in the islands permanently. For most of these men, good jobs in Japan were hard to find. They were second or third sons in agricultural families.<sup>18</sup> Many of the Japanese who ventured to Hawaii considered themselves fortunate to have escaped Japan at that time. When the Japanese government privatized property in 1872, the peasants were

devastated by newly established burdensome land taxes, unstable rice prices, and bad harvests. "Between 1883 and 1890, 370,000 peasants lost their lands because they were unable to pay taxes."<sup>19</sup> As a result, twenty-eight thousand people had volunteered in response to the initial Hawaii recruitment, a staggering figure in view of the fact that the Japanese government had expected only six hundred applicants.<sup>20</sup>

Most of these men came from the peasant classes from Hiroshima, Yamaguchi, and Kumamoto prefectures. This area of Japan was known as the "stronghold" of Shinshū Buddhism. As a result, when Buddhist priests and temples came to Hawaii, Shinshū was the strongest. Some argued that it possessed "almost dominating power among the Buddhists of these islands."<sup>21</sup>

The immigrants lived in Japanese camps outside or on the plantations. The work on the plantations was brutally hard. Life outside of work was unorganized and chaotic. With little spending money and a male to female ratio of 5:1, morale was low and gambling and alcohol abuse high. Sanitation and living conditions were deplorable. In addition, with long, exhausting working conditions, alcohol, and humid weather, many workers fell ill or died. "Except for all-night weekend gambling sessions arranged for young men by Japanese gangsters from Honolulu, the Japanese plantation laborers had little occasion to engage in boisterous recreation. Oshogatsu, the Obon festival in midsummer, the Emperor's birthday in early November, and family weddings and funerals were among the few events that broke the monotonous routine of the daily lives of the Japanese plantation workers."<sup>22</sup>

Initially, the immigrants did not need to have shrines or temples. Many even found it easier to just concentrate on what they found around them, worshipping as they saw. While in Hawaii, they focused on their surroundings, such as the sun and nature. "The sun [gave] them the light which [was] essential to their existence. The sun [took] care of the crops. They [said] that the pious men and women [worshipped] the sun at the sunrise to ask for his day's blessing and [worshipped] the sunset to give him thanks for his days' protection."<sup>23</sup> The native Hawaiian religion easily identified with Shintō because it also placed an emphasis on nature and spirits. However, when beliefs dealing with the "non-visible" spirits of the ancestors arose, something had to be created. Concrete items like the *butsudan* became necessary. Shintō and Buddhism differed in this respect. Since Buddhism placed its emphasis on future salvation rather than the comfort and happiness of the everyday honored by Shintō, the two could co-exist rather easily in Hawaii.

When any tradition enters a country, it is met with several reactions. It can be embraced by those who wanted it to come, reviled by those who opposed its power potential or feared its sweep, or treated with indifference. For the Kingdom of Hawaii, all three reactions were felt when

Buddhism and Shintō entered. During the nineteenth century Hawaii had already undergone a major religious upheaval. In 1819, King Kamehameha II abolished the old pagan laws and taboo practices, opening the door for Christian Protestant missionaries who arrived in 1820. These missionaries were wildly successful, converting the royal family, members of the nobility, and some commoners as well. These missionaries were invited to stay and many of the early Caucasian plantation owners were descendants of these early missionaries. By 1826, the country was considered Protestant and, despite encouragement by the French government, other religions, particularly Catholicism, were discouraged.<sup>24</sup>

From this perspective, it's easy to see why the Hawaiians hesitated to allow another religion to enter, particularly another "pagan" one, which was how they regarded Buddhism. The Americans initially encouraged this view and, since this was the time when Christianity grew in the islands, King Kalakaua hesitated to do anything new.<sup>25</sup> The Japanese government and Buddhist headquarters in Kyoto aided in this ambivalence by not sending any Buddhist or Shintō priests with the first immigrants.

### HAWAIIAN BUDDHISM

Much of the old beliefs from Buddhism and Shintō made the voyage from Japan to Hawaii with the immigrants. However, the modes of worship, rituals, and practices changed or were lost. What they needed was a common meeting place and a leader (read minister) to lead them through the events which occurred in everyday life. Most of the Japanese felt the need to have something in their lives. "On Sunday, the Sabbath Day for their Christian brothers, they had no place to go for their spiritual nourishment. Without religion, some of them acted almost like beasts."<sup>26</sup> They were unable to hold memorial services. No spiritual guidance was available. The priests were the only members of the society able to bring comfort, joy, and hope to the community during crises.<sup>27</sup>

Through monetary donations and labor, the Japanese were willing to help support these services when they came. They needed someone to tend to their religious life; this needed to encompass not only what they had brought with them but also integrate their Hawaii experience. The Japanese definitely aligned themselves with the Buddhists and sought ministers from Japan who could shape the temples and shrines into centers of Japanese sentiment.

Their faith kept the Japanese hopes alive until 1889 when Reverend Soryu Kagahi, a Shinshū Buddhist priest, arrived. He was enthusiastically received by the Japanese who then numbered around eight thousand.<sup>28</sup> A month after his arrival, a small temporary mission was built on Emma Street in Honolulu.<sup>29</sup> Reverend Kagahi held the first formal Buddhist

service in Honolulu on March 15, 1889 and later visited the Japanese on the island of Hawaii as well.

While the headquarters in Japan were in complete agreement with Kagahi's assessment that a mission needed to be started in Hawaii, they disagreed on the way it should be installed. Kagahi argued that "it was necessary to adopt a compromise theory for Hawaii which would extend recognition to the God as exemplified in Christianity as not being in conflict with Buddhism and Shintōism."<sup>30</sup> He asserted that this compromise was necessary due to the fact that Christianity was gaining popular support among the Japanese in Hawaii. He also hoped to avoid any opposition by the Hawaiian government, which was leery of accepting an alien religion. Hence, he argued that the "Christian God and the Buddhist image are identical concepts, that they are viewed or worshipped differently only because of the diverse cultural and historical backgrounds. With this bold and imaginative but expedient explanation, he was eventually regarded with approval."<sup>31</sup>

However, Reverend Kagahi overestimated his support. He had his advantageous explanation published in one of the leading religious journals and was quoted in religious magazines.<sup>32</sup> In essence, he stated that "if Buddhism was to be propagated successfully in Hawaii, its teachings must acknowledge the existence of a deity; otherwise, the Hawaiian Kingdom would not recognize it as a legitimate religion. Consequently, he concluded, Japanese Buddhism should assert the identity of the Christian God and the Buddha."<sup>33</sup> As a result of his indiscretions, the Kyoto headquarters and other religious leaders in Japan refused to give support to Kagahi's theory and his hope of establishing a mission in Hawaii did not materialize.<sup>34</sup>

Shinshū did not try to establish a mission again until 1897 when priest Keijun Miyamoto arrived to survey the situation. He found that "unofficial priests, not confirmed by Kyoto headquarters, had been filling the vacuum by performing religious rites for the Japanese. He also noted a situation where some unscrupulous 'self-styled' priests had been fraudulently soliciting donations and contributions from the immigrants."<sup>35</sup> In 1897, Hongwanji headquarters officially designated Hawaii a mission site and sent Honi Satomi as director. In 1900, he was replaced by Yemyo Imamura who was very successful among the Shinshū believers.

The first Buddhist temple was established in Hilo on the Big Island in 1889. Of the thirty-six temples<sup>36</sup> initially established, three-quarters of them were located in rural, agricultural areas and the rest in the "urban" areas such as Honolulu and Hilo. The reason the majority of the temples were built in rural areas was two-fold. Primarily, that was where the majority of the Japanese resided. Secondly, in many cases, the Buddhist tradition was encouraged by the plantation owners. The owners felt that the importation of the rituals and customs of Shintō and Buddhism would



overcome the sense of isolation for the Japanese and might encourage them to work harder.<sup>37</sup> It also helped bring about stability to the plantation communities. As a result, the plantations donated land on the plantation property for the Japanese to build their temples and language schools. "In 1901 the Waipahu and Kahuku plantations started subsidizing Buddhist temples and schools; Ewa, Aiea, Waialua, and Waianae plantations followed in 1903, and Waimanalo plantation in 1904. All major plantations on the other islands also rendered similar assistance, either through the grant of rent-free lands or monetary subsidies. Such subsidies and assistance continued until the 1920 plantations strike."<sup>38</sup> In general, the plantation owners' faith in the initial comforting aspect was well-placed. For instance, in Waialua, "the partnership [between the Waialua Sugar Company and the Japanese workers] has been mutually beneficial because the Buddhist virtues of patience, thrift, industry, loyalty, and courtesy, provided good workers for the plantation. The Waialua Agricultural Co., Ltd., provided lease-free land where the temple, classrooms, and minister's residence were built."<sup>39</sup>

Jōdo Shinshū was extremely popular among the Japanese for many reasons. This religion was given to the Japanese and was able to keep its adherents by adapting itself to any new situation which was demanded. As one scholar noted, "This Shinshū of the Jōdo Buddhism has a vitality which is rather unique among the rest of the Buddhist sects in Japan. Unhampered by any metaphysical or ceremonial systems, it seems to be able to adjust itself to the great changes—political, economical, and social—...and to continue its comparatively strong hold upon the people of this generation."<sup>40</sup> Interestingly enough, Jōdo in Haleiwa in 1912 was founded by Reverend Murayama among the Chinese residents.<sup>41</sup>

Buddhism received a strong acceptance of legitimacy when Queen Liliuokalani attended the Birth Ceremony of the Buddha on May 19, 1901. Her attendance caused a tremendous amount of interest in Buddhism and her participation was reported throughout the world. It was an unprecedented event in that a non-Japanese had participated in a Japanese group activity.<sup>42</sup>

By 1920, the Census recorded a hundred ten thousand Japanese out of the total population of two hundred fifty thousand in the islands. Four daily Japanese language newspapers and more than eighty Buddhist temples and Shintō shrines were now located in Hawaii.<sup>43</sup> These numbers both encouraged and unnerved the larger population, especially the leaders in the islands who were concerned over the large Japanese minority population. These facts brought two big changes in the immigrant's way of life in Hawaii. First, once they left the plantations, a variety of jobs, both in the city and on the farms, was more available.<sup>44</sup> Second, they were no longer looking at Hawaii as a temporary home to earn money but rather as a place to live and raise families. As a result, as early as 1909, they were no

longer sending wages back to Japan but, rather, were using them to maintain and strengthen ties in Hawaii.

Picture brides began arriving in 1905. Approximately nine thousand five hundred came between 1911 to 1919 and continued arriving until all immigration was stopped in 1924. Many of the bachelors decided their stays in Hawaii were going to be longer than they expected so they asked their parents to find them suitable wives. Parents worked with go-betweens and, if the prospective couple had not known each other, photographs were exchanged. If all agreed, the bride's name was transferred to her future husband's family records in Japan and the *shashin kekkon* ("photograph marriage") was legal in the eyes of the Japanese government. Then the wives departed for Hawaii. Marriages were that simple in Japan. In Hawaii, however, immigration authorities refused to accept the legality of the *shashin kekkon* and required that the Japanese couples be joined in matrimony by exchanging Christian vows as soon as the "picture brides" arrived in Hawaii. The assembly-line Christian marriages performed at the immigration compound were unpopular among Hawaii's Japanese. Fred Makino, editor of the *Hawaii Hochi*, wrote, "The freedom of choosing an appropriate religious service...should be allowed the individual if there is freedom of religion."<sup>45</sup> Noting that the majority of Japanese were Buddhists and not Christians, the *Hochi* called for either an immediate end to the wharf marriages or permission for representatives of all religious faiths to enter the immigration compound and perform marriages. As a result of this and other protests, mass Shintō or Buddhist ceremonies were held instead. In 1917, the practice of mandatory wharf marriages was formally abolished. New couples generally headed to the Shintō shrine<sup>46</sup> closest to their new home.

As men and women married, started families, and moved off the plantations and into other jobs around the islands, religion and other activities became more important. Many Issei left the sugar cane and pineapple fields and went to work for companies or established small businesses of their own. They used this newfound monetary and labor freedom to start and support institutions that enabled the family and community to foster cultural ties and maintain identity. These institutions included not only churches and temples but also language schools, newspapers, and social clubs.<sup>47</sup> These institutions served the Japanese as places which supported them in the face of covert and overt racial discrimination.

Temples were built in the Japanese style and helped ensure stability. They gave the Japanese not only a place to worship but also a place to express themselves. "At the temple they are in a sense, 'free'. They may converse, laugh, and think together in Japanese. If the temples can somehow make them feel comfortable, then Buddhism has accomplished its greatest good in Hawaii."<sup>48</sup> Therefore, the temple was a place of festivity. Worshippers chanted their prayers loudly. They entered the temple with

celebration and community. This they sum up as being *arigatai* (appreciative or thankful).<sup>49</sup> In the Japanese community, the temple fulfilled a need, not just spiritually but also economically and socially. "In the rural areas where farmers populated, a temple played a role of a 'community center' as such. The priests were expected to be not only spiritual and religious leaders but also a sort of counselor who dealt with many other secular things as well."<sup>50</sup>

The temples and ministers finally gave the Japanese a means of burying their dead, something that was very important to the Japanese workers as many immigrants died due to accident or illness. With no way to perform proper services, crude methods had been applied. The roommates of the deceased (the bachelors usually lived four or five to a room in the camp house) were permitted to leave work thirty minutes early to arrange the burial. "The body was placed in a crude box and carted away to a cemetery site by mule and lowered into a hastily dug hole. No temples were there, nor priests to administer the last rites to the forgotten souls passing away on foreign soil."<sup>51</sup> As a result, the arrival of the ministers was met with great joy.

Buddhist-style funerals were very comforting to the immigrants. As one Issei woman noted, "It just doesn't seem final without the smell of the incense, the temple gong, and the chanting of the prayers at funerals. These haole services are so incomplete and cold. There almost seems to be no respect for the dead."<sup>52</sup> Most of the immigrants felt that a Buddhist minister was necessary for a proper burial. It never occurred to them that the Christian services could be as comforting. Furthermore, rituals associated with the *butsudan* and departed relatives still had meaning. One girl, remembering the rituals associated with her sister's memory stated, "Any delicacy which the family partakes is shared with my deceased sister; that is we place some of it on the altar."<sup>53</sup> Buddhist rituals, while not always clearly understood by the Nisei, were important.

One of the greatest changes in the role of Buddhism in Hawaii was the role of the priest. Initially sought for rituals for the sick and dead, the minister found himself taking a much more active role in the islands. The main temple had a resident priest who officiated at all events, journeyed to the different rural temples on important ceremonial days, and performed funerals. The minister was usually young, sent from Japan after finishing his training, and was expected to live with his wife and family on the temple grounds. "In his living quarters are many signs of his Japanese origin—a portrait of the great Emperor Meiji, a map of Asia. An American touch is a radio. Instead of Japanese tea, the priest's wife frequently serves Kona coffee to guests."<sup>54</sup> He usually spoke little English. While that did not hamper him in his dealings with the Issei, it did hinder his efforts to minister to the second generation.<sup>55</sup>

As in Japan, many more families were affiliated with each temple than attended each week. It was not unusual for a minister to conduct a funeral for someone he hadn't met. In addition to the more traditional functions such as presiding over funerals, the role of the minister expanded into areas previously covered by Shintō priests or done only through government records. The most radical change was the Buddhist priest officiating at weddings because of the law requiring a minister to perform the ceremony for the picture bride weddings.<sup>56</sup> "A wedding officiated by a Buddhist seldom occurs in Japan but in Hawaii it is a common practice today. 'Priest for funeral; wedding by Kannushu—the Shintō priest,' is a common saying in Japan. It would be regarded as a bad omen even to have a Buddhist priest at a wedding feast. But in Hawaii such feeling does not exist."<sup>57</sup> The minister made hospital rounds and did marriage counseling. The minister also performed rituals for babies when they reached one hundred days old. House and business dedications were also performed. "These services, as well as funerals and weddings, are not always in accordance with Shinran's true teachings. Some services are similar to Christian or Shintō services. Nevertheless, they are carried out, because they conform with people's expectations."<sup>58</sup>

Other ways in which Buddhism changed was in its appearance and terminology. Temples became churches, priests became ministers, and, in some cases, the Buddha became God, especially by the young people. Examining the reaction of her parents to the accidental death of her older brother, a young girl wrote, "They [did not] curse against God for taking away a member of our family. Instead they prayed very hard and tried to make themselves and the rest of the family understand that God wanted it that way, that Brother Fred had only been loaned to us, and that it was the day set for his return to God's land."<sup>59</sup> Regardless of her terminology, she regarded her family as "true Buddhists." By following the proper services, they hoped to help his spirit reach "heaven."<sup>60</sup>

The use of the word "church" became more appropriate because, in Hawaii, the Buddhist places of worship bore a remarkable resemblance to Christian churches. Although still Japanese in design with the Buddhist symbols in the altar, these buildings added pews for sitting as opposed to the customary sitting on the floor. Hymn books with hymns newly created or altered from Christian ones and sermons became common. The "churches" adopted Sunday as the day of worship with Sunday school for the children. Choir and young men's and young women's Buddhist associations adapted from the YMCA and YWCA were created. Sermons and talks at the services were not only given on various aspects of Buddhist doctrine but also themes about how to live life in Hawaii as a good Buddhist. As a distinctly Hawaiian touch, leis, both floral and non-floral, were given to guests at services.

Despite the similarities, fundamental differences continued between Christianity and Buddhism. The Buddhist churches were by no means suggesting an adoption of Christianity, only modes of worship and vernacular. While some asserted that "Buddhists have not given a second thought about abandoning Buddhist customs and embracing Western frills,"<sup>61</sup> most realized that Buddhism was not diluting its message, but rather strengthening its position. As one Buddhist practitioner argued, "Well, you think the adoption of organ music and singing seems to digress from the original Buddhist practice. Of course, in Japan, we use the gong and wooden clapper. But in Hawaii we just make our service suitable and understandable to the young people. Buddhism brought with it Indian music and other Indian rituals of worship but when it came to Japan, most of it was altered to suit Japanese believers."<sup>62</sup> Therefore, the Japanese in Hawaii did not feel there was a conflict between the belief and the practice.

In most towns in Hawaii, the festival calendar consisted of both Buddhist and Shintō holidays. New Year's (Shintō) and Bon (Buddhist) were the most popular, but also Boy's Day and Girl's Day as well as some seasonal agricultural festivals survived as well. New Year's, a traditionally Shintō holiday, consisted of purification rituals. Houses and businesses were cleaned, special food was eaten and offered to the gods, and a trip to the shrine was taken to purify the body and to purchase talismans to protect the home and person. Another major aspect of Japanese religion, the Bon festival, was also altered in Hawaii. Bon was the season to honor the ancestors. The *butsudan* was more elaborately decorated and special foods and flowers were offered.

The *bon-odori*, the dance held at the end of Bon season, became very popular in Hawaii; however, for many Nisei, it became more of a social event, rather than a religious holiday. "He [participated] in the Bon-odori more for the pleasure and fun he [derived] from it than for the religious significance attached to it, namely, to entertain the spirits of the dead."<sup>63</sup>

Many of the elaborate rituals surrounding life changes have been altered in Hawaii. For instance, the celebration of *yakudoshi* (the "good luck" celebration given during the "bad luck" years of one's life) had become a big party in Hawaii rather than an elaborate series of rituals, with aspects of all walks of Hawaiian life interspersed.<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, previously Japanese-only events were adopted into the larger Hawaiian society. "The fine arts of the Japanese have found their way into the life of Hawaii and have in some instances become an integral part of the cultural life of the islands....Kite day, boy day with its great suspended gaily colored cloth fish flying in the air, and girl day or doll day are all festivals that Hawaii looks upon as its own."<sup>65</sup>

Buddhism's journey was similar to the immigrants who brought it to Hawaii. It left Japan during a time of upheaval when its position was threatened and, in some places, destroyed. However, when it came to

Hawaii, it was embraced by the immigrants and encouraged by the plantation owners. While Christians opposed the spread of Buddhism in the islands, Buddhism borrowed aspects of Christianity in order to help it fit into Hawaiian society. Finally, its association with Shintō, discouraged in Japan, continued in Hawaii as a means for the Japanese to complete their spiritual lives. For plantation Hawaii, the Buddhist church provided stability, organization, and peace of mind for the Issei, ideals which undoubtedly led to the strengthening of the Japanese community in Hawaii.

## NOTES

1. This is part of my doctoral dissertation: "Meiji 'Buddhism' in America: A Study of the Effect of *shinbutsu bunri* on Jōdo Shinshū in Hawaii and the West Coast" (University of California Santa Barbara, forthcoming).
2. Louise H. Hunter, *Buddhism in Hawaii* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1971), p. 162.
3. David Matsumoto, "Japanese Buddhism in America: Shared Issues, Common Themes," Buddhist Churches of America National Council Meeting, University of California, Los Angeles, February 21, 2003.
4. While somewhat isolated initially on the plantations, Japanese did have contact with ethnic groups besides the Caucasian owners. Filipinos often worked on the same plantations, living in "Filipino Camps." Native Hawaiians often filled the role of plantation *luna* (foreman). Therefore, their exposure to these different ethnic groups on the plantations and in the cities strongly influenced the shape of their lives in the islands.
5. Acculturation refers to the "adaptation of a group to American middle-class norms" while keeping ethnic traits (Eileen H. Tamura, *Americanization, Acculturation, and Ethnic Identity* [Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994], p. 52). However, in explaining the experience of early twentieth century America, assimilation was used more than acculturation (Tamura, *Americanization*, p. 49).
6. Assimilation has been used interchangeably with Americanization to imply that immigrants would adopt dominant Caucasian traits and eliminate all of their native culture (Tamura, *Americanization*, p. 49).
7. "Americanization entails the complete adoption of American institutions and the elimination of all aspects of their native culture" (Milton M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1964], pp. 100–101).
8. Cultural pluralism argued that aspects of the cultures of immigrants would persist through the immigrants' integration into American society (Gordon, *Assimilation*, pp. 85–86).
9. Perhaps just as it had when it entered Japan in the first place (i.e.: strong patronage, ability to adapt to lifestyle of practitioners, etc.)?
10. Harry H. L. Kitano, *Generations and Identity: The Japanese American* (Massachusetts: Gin Press, 1993), p. 105.
11. Hideo Kishimoto, ed., *Japanese Religion in the Meiji Era* (Tokyo: The Toyo Bunko), pp. 4–6.

12. Hirochika Nakamaki, "Religious Civilization," in Tadao Umesao, Helen Hardacre, and Hirochika Nakamaki, ed., *Japanese Civilization in the Modern World*, v. 6 (Osaka: Museum of Ethnology, 1990), p. 121.
13. Brian Bocking, "Fundamental Rites? Religion, State, Education, and the Invention of Sacred Heritage in Post-Christian Britain and Pre-War Japan" *Religion* 25 (1995): p. 246, 56n.
14. Hunter, *Buddhism in Hawaii*, p. 103, n.
15. Waiialua Hongwanji Mission, *65th Anniversary Celebration: St. Shinran's 700th Memorial Observance* (Hawaii: n. p., 1964), p. 30.
16. Delman L. Kuykendall, *The Japanese in Hawaii* (Hawaii: n. p., 1949), p. 5.
17. Dennis M. Ogawa and Glen Grant, *To a Land Called Tengoku: 100 Years of the Japanese in Hawaii* (Honolulu: Mutual Publishing of Honolulu, 1985), p. 9.
18. Eiki Hoshino, *Some Characteristics of Japanese Buddhism in Hawaii* (Honolulu: East-West Religions in Encounter, 1980), pp. 3–4.
19. Roland Kotani, *The Japanese in Hawaii: A Century of Struggle* (Honolulu: The Hawaii Hochi, Ltd., 1985), p. 11.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
21. Paul J. Tajima, "Japanese Buddhism in Hawaii: Its Background, Origin, and Adaptation to Local Conditions" (University of Hawaii, M.A. Thesis, 1935), pp. 16–17.
22. Kotani, *The Japanese in Hawaii*, p. 26.
23. Yukiko Kimura, *A Study of the Pattern of Religious Concepts of the Japanese in Hawaii* (Honolulu: YWCA, 1943), pp. 3–4.
24. George Y. Yamamoto, *Origin of Buddhism in Hawaii: Brief Chronological Table of Japanese in Hawaii* (Honolulu: YBA of Honolulu Publication, 1976), p. 3.
25. *Ibid.*
26. Wailuku Hongwanji Mission, *65th Anniversary Celebration: St. Shinran's 700th Memorial Observance* (Hawaii: n. p., 1964), p. 19.
27. Francis Hevesi, "Kahuna and Kohen: A Study in Comparative Religion," *Social Process in Hawaii*, 16 (1952): p. 30.
28. James H. Okahata, *A History of Japanese in Hawaii* (Honolulu: The United Japanese Society of Hawaii), p. 228.
29. *Glimpses of Japanese in Hawaii (Including What They Eat and What They Wear)*, (Honolulu: The Nippu Jiji, 1928), p. 6.
30. Okahata, *A History of Japanese in Hawaii*, pp. 228–229.
31. Yamamoto, *Origin of Buddhism*, p. 2.



32. Okahata, *A History of Japanese in Hawaii*, pp. 228–229.
33. Yamamoto, *Origin of Buddhism*, p. 3.
34. Okahata, *A History of Japanese in Hawaii*, pp. 228–229.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 229.
36. Five of the main forms of Mahayana Buddhism in Japan (Shinshū, Jōdo, Soto Zen, Nichiren, and Shingon) came to Hawaii between 1894 and 1918. When they came, Buddhist temples made their way next to Chinese temples, Hawaiian *heiaus*, and Christian churches.
37. Their beliefs proved true when Shinshū priests were essential in helping end plantation labor strikes before they started.
38. Okahata, *A History of the Japanese in Hawaii*, pp. 229–230.
39. Waiialua Hongwanji Mission, *75th Anniversary*, p. 31.
40. Tajima, *Japanese Buddhism*, p. 33.
41. Haleiwa Jōdo Mission and Haleiwa Taisho Gakko, *50th Anniversary Celebration: November 1, 1964* (Hawaii: n. p., 1964), p. 8.
42. Yamamoto, *Origin of Buddhism*, p. 11.
43. Albert W. Palmer, *The Human Side of Hawaii* (Boston: The Pilgrim Press, 1924), p. 104.
44. Hoshino, *Some Characteristics*, p. 7.
45. Kotani, *The Japanese in Hawaii*, p. 59.
46. Many of the “traditional” services provided by Shintō priests such as weddings and coming-of-age ceremonies were not originally performed by priests. They were either business propositions by two families or informal family celebrations. It is only after Meiji begins that priests assumed these duties (Helen Hardacre, *Shintō and the State* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989], pp. 110–111).
47. John Gerald Tamashiro, “Konkokyo, A Japanese Religion in Hawaii” (Ph.D. Dissertation: University of Hawaii, 1985), p. 132.
48. Margaret Miki, “Mother and her Temple,” *Social Process in Hawaii* 12(1948): pp. 21–22.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
50. Eiki Hoshino, *Some Characteristics*, p. 2.
51. *85th Anniversary of the Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii: In Commemoration of the 800th Anniversary of Shinran Shonin* (Honolulu: Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii, 1974), p. 10.
52. Margaret Miki, “Mother and Her Temple,” p. 19.
53. Emi Yoshizawa, “A Japanese Family in Rural Hawaii,” *Social Process in Hawaii*, 3 (1937): p. 61.

54. Embree, "Acculturation Among," pp. 105–106.
55. Charles Hasegawa, "The Hongwanji Buddhist Minister in Hawaii," *Social Process in Hawaii*, 26 (1963): p. 79.
56. Embree, "Acculturation Among," p. 107.
57. Tajima, *Japanese Buddhism in Hawaii*, p. 49.
58. Hasegawa, "The Hongwanji Buddhist," pp. 75–76.
59. Masako Tanaka, "Religion in our Family," *Social Process in Hawaii*, 12 (1948), p. 15.
60. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
61. Yoshiaki Fujitani, "Buddhist Criticizes Present Practices," *Honolulu Star-Bulletin* (March 6, 1965), A-6.
62. Bernard L. Hormann, "The Revival of Buddhism in Hawaii," *What People are Saying and Doing*. Report No. 12. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, December 1, 1947), p. 4.
63. Katsumi Onishi, "'Bon' and 'Bon-Odori'," *Social Process in Hawaii* 3(1937): 49–53.
64. Dennis M. Ogawa and Glen Grant, *Hawaii's Yakudoshi Guide Book* (Honolulu: Nippon Golden Network, 1990), p. 16.
65. Ladenson, *The Japanese in Hawaii*, p. 191.