

Complex Loyalties: Issei Buddhist Ministers during the Wartime Incarceration¹

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December 7, 1941: A Jōdō-e Ceremony to Remember

The Southern California Coastal Region's Young Buddhist Association had planned a Jōdō-e ceremony, so I drove thirty miles to in Guadalupe. When I got there, Rev. Todoroki of the San Luis Obispo Buddhist Temple said to me, "This will really be a Jōdō-e ceremony to remember." Unsure what he meant, I replied, "Why? What's going on?" "War has begun!" he said, "I just heard on the radio that Japan has attacked Hawaii." [...] I thought the planes must surely have been German, but then I heard a radio broadcast from Japan that began with the harsh words "As the Pacific is now at war,...." With its military marching music in the background, that broadcast left no doubt that war had indeed begun.

There we were, 5,000 miles from our country, living in America at a time when we would be seen as enemy aliens. So at that memorable Young Buddhist Association Jōdō-e ceremony that evening, I said, "When we Buddhists look west, we ordinarily think about returning home to Japan. But now, we must look even further west, to the Pure Land, and be prepared to return there instead. With a mind as firm as the Diamond Seat upon which the Buddha is seated, let us live each day with this immovable Diamond Mind."

Despite this declaration, my own mind thoughts were troubled as I returned home along the mountain roads that night. Although while in Guadalupe I had called home ordering them to destroy the documents, I was worried that the American authorities had gotten there before me. I was anxious that anything that might cause trouble for my fellow Japanese in America be destroyed.²

The above is a diary entry by Rev. Daishō Tana. Tana was a Nishi Honganji minister in California whose immediate reaction to Pearl Harbor gives us a sense of his disbelief about the attack, his resignation to his

situation as an enemy alien, his faith in Pure Land Buddhism in the face of possible death, and his concern about certain documents at his Buddhist temple that might have been construed as anti-American. Although immigrant Japanese Buddhists and their American children had assimilated considerably by 1941, Rev. Tana recognized that however Americanized the Japanese had become, the perception of the Japanese community and their Buddhist heritage held by the United States government and the public-at-large was tainted with suspicion and fear.

Rev. Tana's instincts were correct. Even before Pearl Harbor, the FBI, ONI (Office of Naval Intelligence), and Canadian Intelligence had been investigating Buddhists in Hawaii, California, and Canada. By means of surveillance teams assigned to temples including the Shingon sect Los Angeles Kōyasan Temple and intelligence reports filed on suspect Buddhist priests, the names of Buddhist priests were compiled in what later became known as the "ABC" list, a list of those to be arrested if war was declared. At least three years prior to the bombing of Pearl Harbor, intelligence units had commissioned studies on the "Americanization" and "potential loyalty" of Buddhists versus Christians in the Nikkei community. The studies had concluded that Buddhists were more likely than their Christian counterparts to identify with Japan and less able to properly "Americanize." One such report by the Counter Subversion Section of the ONI (which shared information with the FBI and Army Intelligence), declassified at my request from the National Archives, states:

Affiliated with Buddhist and Shinto temples are Japanese Language Schools, welfare societies, young people's Buddhist societies, and Buddhist women's associations. They provide excellent resources for intelligence operations, have proved to be very receptive to Japanese propaganda, and in many cases have contributed considerable sums to the Japanese war effort. Japanese Christian Churches are much less closely affiliated with the Japanese Government, and there is considerable evidence to indicate that their major concern outside of religious matters centers on improving Japanese-American relations and the restoration of peace in Eastern Asia. At the same time, it is true that some individuals and groups among Japanese Christians are working against the interests of this country.³

Here, while particular Christian persons or churches were suspect in the minds of the U.S. government, Buddhists and "Shintoists" were suspect as a category. Indeed, under Hoover's FBI, the final ABC list categorized Buddhist priests along with Shintō priests, unlike their Christian counterparts, as "known dangerous Group A suspects," a group which

also included members of the Japanese consulate, Japanese language instructors, fishermen, and martial arts teachers—in other words, those whose arrest should be of immediate priority in the event of war.

While it would have been reasonable for intelligence agencies to keep their eyes on a particular person or a specific temple suspected of subversive activity, the wholesale categorization of all Buddhists as inherently suspect reflected the government's fear of social elements that seemed foreign and un-American. Indeed, the authorities' readiness to lump whole groups of people together, rather investigating individual suspects on a case-by-case basis (as done with the German- and Italian-American community), reflected the addition of racial discrimination to religious discrimination as all persons of Japanese ancestry on the West Coast of the United States and Canada were incarcerated during the war.

The wartime incarceration of nearly 120,000 Japanese and Japanese-Americans has been explored by many scholars from legal, political, social, economic, and literary viewpoints, but research on the religious life of those incarcerated has received relatively little attention.⁴ In particular, the experiences of Issei Buddhists (both ministers and regular temple members) during the war have undergone little scholarly investigation. This essay attempts to focus on the complex feelings of the Issei Buddhists, whose wartime experiences and loyalties were somewhat different from those of their Nisei American children.⁵ I draw primarily from previously unexamined Japanese-language letters, diary entries, and sermons that I have translated. As this issue of *Pacific World* is dedicated to the late Professor Masatoshi Nagatomi, I have also included several letters and sermons composed by his father, Rev. Shinjō Nagatomi, the well-known Jōdo Shinshū minister who served the Buddhist population in Manzanar, California, one of the ten Wartime Relocation Administration (WRA) camp.

December 8, 1941: The First Arrests

At 7 a.m., I received a telephone call informing me that Mr. "T," who had ridden back [from Guadalupe], had been arrested by the FBI immediately upon his return home. As I was still new to this post, I hadn't made a thorough account of all the documents. But I thought that I would most immediately need to deal with all documents related to the Japanese embassy, the Japanese Association, and the Women's Association. I put aside the Emperor's photo as my personal property and, aware that I would assume full responsibility for any consequences, I started burning everything. That's when a call came from Mr. "I," warning me to get rid of all

the receipts from our donations to the Japanese military. I told him I was dealing with other materials at that moment. [...]

After this, all the children began to arrive at the temple's Japanese-language school, just as usual. I thought that the continuation of the Japanese-language school would be misunderstood by the American officials. So, after telling some folk tales to the first and second year students, we went to the Buddha hall to hold the Jōdō-e ceremony and a school closing ceremony. I told the students to be good Americans, as the children of Japanese parents, and to keep up their regular attendance at the white people's school.⁶

Rev. Tana's next diary entry further illustrates the anxiety among Buddhist priests that, with the outbreak of war, Buddhist temples would be deemed subversive by the U.S. government because of their association with Japanese culture, Japanese schooling, and the Japanese military campaign in China. At the same time, his advice to the children to "be good Americans as the children of Japanese parents" reflects the ambiguous situation of the Issei, who wanted to educate their children about Japan, but who also knew that their American children held the key to the entire community's future in the United States. It was with these complex loyalties that the Issei faced this critical moment: on the one hand was their Japanese heritage and on the other were their Japanese-American children and the adopted homeland where many Japanese would live out their days. (We should recall that under racially biased laws, the Issei, unlike European immigrants, could not acquire American citizenship.) Their loyalties would be severely tested on all sides, both within the Japanese-American community (for example, by Japanese-American Christians encouraging Buddhists to convert to Christianity to display loyalty to America) and outside it by the U.S. government (the most well-known example being the "Loyalty Questionnaire," which deeply divided individual families and the entire community).

The government's fear of a Japanese "fifth column" that could emerge from a strongly "disloyal" Buddhist community often approached the irrational. A diary of another Nishi Honganji priest, Rev. Bunyū Fujimura, described the events of December 8, 1941:

The next day, the 8th, the sun shone through the clouds. Early that morning, the Salinas Chief of Police came and ordered me to take down our temple gong. He said that the people of Salinas were frightened that if the Japanese Imperial Navy sailed into Monterey Bay, our gong could be used to signal them. He said if we did not take our gong down, he would burn the tower containing it.

The sound of our temple gong could hardly be heard upwind in the city, and only a few miles downwind. How ridiculous to

even think that its sound could be heard in Monterey, 19 miles away. And how much more ridiculous to think that sounding it would be any help to an invading army. But this is an indication of the hysteria among some people in Salinas about the Japanese Imperial Navy.

I was not sure how to comply with the Police Chief's order, because most Japanese were so frightened they did not dare step outside their homes. Fortunately, the Osugi Garage was located just in front of our temple. I asked Mr. Osugi if he would bring a chain hoist used to raise cars. With the help of Mr. Kihei Yamashita, a member of our temple, I cut a hole in the platform of the tower, and used the hoist to lower the gong to the ground.⁷

While there was no doubt that loyalty to Japan and pro-Japanese military sentiments were common among many Issei, who felt a sense of pride that their country was rising as an Asian power while they faced harsh racial discrimination in their adopted homeland, most Issei simultaneously felt a strong kinship and sympathy with America, especially after the Pearl Harbor attack. Attempts by Buddhist leaders to demonstrate loyalty to America (for example by denouncing the Japanese military, promoting U.S. war bonds, or encouraging blood donations to the Red Cross) nevertheless ran up against wartime hysteria as exemplified by the Salinas police department's demand to dismantle the temple bell.⁸ The identification of Buddhism as the "religion of the enemy" was further strengthened in the public imagination by articles including one entitled, "U.S. Uproots Jap Aliens" in the March 9, 1942, issue of *Life Magazine*, which was accompanied by a photo of the Salinas Buddhist Temple's bell platform minus the bell.⁹ What would today be called "hate crimes" were also directed against Buddhists, such as an incident in which local white boys took their shotguns to the Fresno Buddhist Temple and used the front entrance of the building for target practice. Their potshots were particularly aimed at the ancient Buddhist symbol called the *manji*, which represented an aerial view of a *stūpa* and which adorns many Buddhist temples around the world. An ancient Indian symbol, the *manji* coincidentally—and unfortunately—resembles a German Nazi swastika (though reversed, and predating the swastika by thousands of years). But the weeks and months in the wake of Pearl Harbor were no time for the Issei to try to educate their non-Buddhist neighbors about the difference between a *manji* and a swastika. Trying to convince their neighbors of their loyalty to the United States would only prove fruitless for Buddhists at a time when many Americans, including the U.S. government, viewed their faith as inherently suspicious and foreign. To America they were still Japanese, and so the enemy.

Incarceration

Within days or weeks of Pearl Harbor, Buddhist priests of all sects were rounded up by the FBI in Hawaii, the United States mainland, and Canada. Although the larger Japanese and Japanese-American population in Hawaii did not experience incarceration in camps, as was the fate of those who happened to live to on the West Coast of the United States and Canada, nearly every Buddhist priest and all Shintō priests on the Hawaiian islands were quickly apprehended. A Jōdo sect priest from Hawaii, Rev. Kyokujō Kubokawa, described his experience in a letter to his headquarters in Japan:

[...] Early morning last December 7th, along with priests from various Buddhist sects [in Hawaii], I attended a Jōdō-e Ceremony at the Nishi Honganji Betsuin hosted by the various sects' Young Buddhist Associations. I returned at around 8 a.m. Just after 9 a.m., the Sunday School children had arrived as usual and it was then that we heard that war had begun. All kinds of rumors were circulating, but we didn't know if any of them were true or not. At around 4 p.m., the military police came to interview me and I realized for the first time the gravity of the situation. [...]

From then and until mid-February, all Honolulu-based Shintō, Buddhist, and Christian ministers, as well as people associated with the Japanese language schools and other Japanese associations, have been living in tents on a small island [Sand Island].

It was as if I was having an experience just like Hōnen Shōnin's when he was exiled. On January 15th, we held a Memorial Service for our sect founder, Hōnen Shōnin, despite not having a scroll with the sacred words [Namu Amida Butsu]. Being locked up in a remote place where we couldn't prepare any incense, flowers, or candles, we gathered all [Jōdo sect] members together and gave gratitude to the teaching simply by placing our palms together and reciting Buddhist scriptures.

The Jōdo Mission of Hawaii Betsuin in Honolulu was occupied by the U.S. Army. [...] The priest who was looking after the temple in our absence, Rev. Kōshin Yamane, was investigated and so Mrs. Nago, the wife of Rev. Masaki Nago, and who was not under investigation, took care of the temple. Although she was not allowed to live there, we got a letter from her that she received permission to clean the Buddha altar and conduct ceremonies there once in a while.

There are a total of "XX" Jōdo Mission priests from the various islands of Hawaii who have already been captured and sent to the U.S. mainland. The priests have been dispersed to various internment camps, but I do not know who and where they have all been

taken. I don't know the whereabouts of the five [Hawaiian] priests nor of Revs. Nozaki and Mukuhon of Los Angeles.
[...]

Because there is a quota on the number of sheets of paper that we can use, let me end here. Both my body and mind are sound, so please do not worry.

May 13, 1942, Superintendent [of the Hawaii Jōdo Mission],
Rev. Kyokujō Kubokawa¹⁰

Buddhist priests like Rev. Kubokawa were initially rounded up and held in local police custody or at secured army locations. While a few priests from Hawaii remained on the islands for the duration of the war (for example at the Honoliuli Camp), most were sent to internment camps on the mainland to join mainland-based priests. In Canada, Buddhist priests were treated in a similar fashion as the general Japanese-Canadian population, which meant some of the younger priests were sent to forced labor camps and others to so-called “ghost towns” in isolated mountainous settlements.

Rev. Kubokawa's censored letter reveals his lack of knowledge of the whereabouts of other Buddhist priests. It was a deliberate tactic of the FBI and Department of Justice (DOJ) to split up internees, move them from camp to camp, and deny them information about what was going on; the censored “XX” in the letter demonstrates that the United States military police determined that the number of priests should not be made public for national security reasons. Below, I summarize basic data that I have gleaned from temple histories, diaries, and oral histories as to the number of temples and shrines in 1941; the sectarian affiliation of Buddhist priests at that time; and where those priests were sent during the war:¹¹

Temples and Shrines in 1941

BY STATE / AREA

- (1) California 133
- (2) Hawaii 114
- (3) Canada 20
- (4) Oregon 9
- (5) Washington 7
- (6) Colorado 4
- (7) Utah 3
- (8) Arizona 2
- (9) New York 1

BY SECT

- (1) Nishi Honganji 134
- (2) Shintō shrines 48
- (3) Shingon 40
- (4) Jōdo 19
- (5) Sōtō Zen 16
- (6) Higashi Honganji 11
- (7) Konkōkyō 10
- (8) Tenrikyō 6
- (9) Nichiren 6
- (10) Independent 1
- (11) Kurozumikyō 1

(Total 292 Temples/Shrines)

Issei Priests (Total = 234 Priests)

Nishi total (100): Abe; Akahoshi; Abiko; Aoki; Asaka; Aso; Fujii; Fujikado; Fujimura; Fujinaga; Fujitani; Hayashima; Hida; Hino; Hirabayashi; Hirahara; Hirayama; Hōjō; Ichikawa; Ikeda; Ikuta; Itahara; Iwanaga; Iwao; Kai; Kanda; Kashima; Kashiwa; Katatsu; Kawamura; Kawasaki; G. Kimura; Kō; Kōno; Kosaka; Kuchiha; Kuwatsuki; Kyogoku; Maebara; Masunaga; Masuoka; Masuyama; Matsubayashi; R. Matsuda; T. Matsuda; Matsukage; T. Matsumoto; I. Matsuura; Matsubayashi; Mayeda; Miura; E. Miyake; Miyazaki; Mizutani; Mori; Motoyoshi; Murakami; K. Nagatani; S. Nagatani; Nagatomi; Nagoya; Nakafuji; Nagatani; Naitō, Nishie, G. Nishii; K. Nishii; Nishinaga; S. Odate; Okayama; Okita; Ōno; Onoyama; Ūchi; Sakow; Sanada; Sasaki; Seki; Shibata; Shigefuji; H. Shimakawa; T. Shimakawa; Shirasu; Sugimoto; Tachibana; Tada; Takezono; Tamai; Tamamaha; Tana; Tatsuguchi; Terakawa; Terao; Todoroki; Tsuruyama; Umehara; Unno; Yamamoto; Yasumitsu; Yonemura

Sōtō Zen total (28): Fujisawa; Ikeda; Itō; Kokuzō; Komagata; Matsuoka; G. Matsuura; Morita; Muroga; Nakayama; Nishizawa; Ochi; Ōkawa; Osada; Ozawa; Shida; Suzuki; R. Tachibana; R. Takahashi; Tanaka; Toda; Tottori; Tsuda; Uejima; Ueoka; Yamasaki; Yamashita; Yoshizumi

Jōdo total (22): Ekūan; Fujihana; Hanada; Hayashi; Hino; Ikejiri; T. Imamura; Kaminoyama; R. Kitajima; S. Kitajima; Kobayashi; Kubokawa; Kubota; Masaki; Mamiya; Miyamoto; Mukushina; Nago; Nozaki; Ōta; Shiratori; Yamane

Shintō total (19): Akizaki; Ikigu; Ishibe; Kawasaki; Kanemori; Kimura; Kobayashi; Kudō; Matsumoto; Miyao; Sakai; K. Satō; T. Satō; Y. Satō; Shimada; Tahara; Takema; Tsuchisaki; Ueda

Konkōkyō total (14): Y. Fukuda; Gotō; Hideshima; Hirayama; Kodama; Nishida; Ōtsubo; Suzuki; Takahashi; Tatsuno; Toshitsugu; Tsuyuki; Yamada; Yasumura

Higashi total (12): Izuhara; Izumida; Kuroda; Kusuda; S. Matsumoto; Mori; Nanda; Chikau Odate; T. Tachibana; Tamayose; Tsufura; Yoshikami

Nichiren total (10): Arakawa; Iijima; Ishihara; Kobayashi; Kurahashi; Mukushima; Murakita; Oda; Okihara; Ōi

Shingon total (6): R. Fukuda; Gikan Kimura; Satodaira; Suetomi; S. Takahashi; Yasui

Tenrikyō total (4): Hashimoto; Higashida; Matsuda; Ueno

Rinzai total (1): Senzaki

Independent total (1): Hata

Unknown total (18): Ama; Fujio; Higa; Higashi; Hirohata; Hotta;
Iwasaki; Katoda; Kawamoto; Kawatsuki; Kobara; Kōchi; T. Miyake;
Okimoto; H. Taira; K. Taira; Takiguchi; Tsuha

Nisei and Sansei Priests (Total = 13 Priests)

Nishi total (6): Imamura; Ishiura; Kumata; Tsuji; M. Tsunoda; S.
Tsunoda

Shintō total (3): Akizaki; Arimoto; Fujino

Shingon total (2): Matsuda; Sogabe

Sōtō Zen total (1): Ueoka

Higashi total (1): G. Kubose

What this data reveals is that in December 1941, there were nearly 300 Buddhist temples and Shintō shrines—located primarily in California (133) and Hawaii (114)—with 134, or just about half, of the temples affiliated with the Nishi Honganji Buddhist Mission of North America (BMNA, later known as Buddhist Churches of America). There were also a substantial number of Shintō shrines (48) and temples of the Shingon (40), Jōdo (19), Sōtō Zen (16), and Higashi Honganji (11) sects. More than 90% of the nearly 250 priests were Issei (234), compared with just 12 Nisei and 1 Sansei priest. The sectarian affiliation of these American-born priests was also primarily with the BMNA, but with substantial numbers of Sōtō Zen and Jōdo priests as well.

The vast majority of these priests were arrested prior to the mass incarceration of the wider Japanese-American community in the United States that began following President Roosevelt's Executive Order No. 9066 issued on February 19, 1942. This executive order led to the designation of restricted military zones on the West Coast and the subsequent removal of all persons of Japanese ancestry from those areas. Those in the restricted zones had between a week and ten days to sell or store their property. They could only take what they could carry by hand to the camps, first "evacuating" to one of the fourteen "assembly centers" where the Nikkei were initially incarcerated for several months before moving on to one of the ten euphemistically-named "relocation centers" run by the Wartime Relocation Authority (WRA). Since most Buddhist priests were initially rounded up by the FBI, many of them spend their initial war years apart from the larger community in the WRA camps.

Incarceration in Camps (in Descending Order of the
Number of Buddhist Priests)

MORE THAN 20 PRIESTS

- (1) DOJ Santa Fe: 87
- (2) WRA Tule Lake: 34
- (3) Army Lordsburg: 26

MORE THAN 10 PRIESTS

- (4) Army Sand Island: 17
- (5) WRA Poston: 17
- (6) WRA Gila River: 16
- (7) DOJ Crystal City: 14
- (8) WRA Jerome: 13
- (9) WRA Heart Mountain: 13
- (10) Army Fort Missoula: 11

MORE THAN 5 PRIESTS

- (11) WRA Topaz: 9
- (12) WRA Minidoka: 8
- (13) WRA Rohwer: 7
- (14) Army Camp Livingstone: 6

3–5 PRIESTS

- (15) WRA Manzanar: 5
- (16) Army Bismark: 5
- (17) Army Camp McCoy: 5
- (18) Army Fort Sill: 5
- (19) Assembly Santa Anita: 5
- (20) Army Camp Forest: 4
- (21) Assembly Pomona: 4
- (22) Assembly Portland: 4
- (23) Assembly Fresno: 3
- (24) Assembly Stockton: 3
- (25) Assembly Turlock: 3
- (26) Army Volcano Army Barracks: 3
- (27) Canada Ghost Town Sandon: 3

2 PRIESTS

- (28) WRA Granada
- (29) Assembly Marysville
- (30) Assembly Sacramento

- (31) Assembly Tanforan
- (32) Army Honouliuli
- (33) Army Kooskia

1 PRIEST

- (34) Canada Army Angler
- (35) Canada Ghost Town Bayfarm/Slocan
- (36) Canada Ghost Town Coaldale
- (37) Canada Ghost Town Lemon Creek
- (38) Canada Ghost Town New Denver
- (39) Canada Ghost Town Tashme
- (40) Canada Road Camp
- (41) Army Fort Sam Houston
- (42) Assembly Merced
- (43) Assembly Puyallup
- (44) Assembly Salinas
- (45) Assembly Tulare
- (46) Ellis Island
- (47) George Meade (MD)

NO PRIESTS

- (48) Canada Ghost Town Greenwood
- (49) Canada Ghost Town Kaslo
- (50) Army Hot Springs
- (51) Army San Antonio
- (52) Army Seagoville
- (53) Assembly Mayer
- (54) Assembly Pinedale

The overwhelming majority (81 priests) of Issei Buddhist priests were imprisoned in the DOJ-run Detention Center in Santa Fe, New Mexico for at least part of the war. Living in the various DOJ, INS, or Army-run camps with Japanese and German prisoners of war, the Buddhist priests were treated as “enemy aliens.” After sustained interrogation, they were then divided into two groups. Those who were deemed safe enough were allowed to join the general population in the WRA-run camps or otherwise join their family in the DOJ’s “family camp” at Crystal City, Texas. The others, deemed dangerous, remained in the DOJ and Army camps, or were repatriated to Japan on one of the prisoner-of-war exchange ships, or were sent in 1943 to the WRA “segregation camp” at Tule Lake (34 priests), where those considered pro-Japan or who had expressed an intention to return to Japan were incarcerated.

Buddhist Teaching and Practice in the Camps

Whether it was in an Assembly Center at a former racetrack such as Tanforan, a WRA camp in the desert such as in Poston, Arizona, or an Army or DOJ camp, Buddhists quickly turned to their faith for sustenance in a difficult time. Buddhists had to be ingenious to create or re-create Buddhist life within this new environment.

A passage from Rev. Bunyū Fujimura's recollections about his days in the Bismark camp, North Dakota, reveals this resourceful nature when the Buddha's birthday, the first major Buddhist holiday since internment began, occurred in April 1942:

April 8th is the day on which the Buddha was born. In the U.S., we call this day Hanamatsuri, Flower Festival. The other Buddhist ministers and I decided to make the most of our circumstances and to celebrate this sacred day for us Buddhists. We petitioned the camp commander for permission to celebrate Hanamatsuri, and surprisingly, were allowed to do so. Everyone's face seemed to brighten at this news. Four Buddhist ministers were incarcerated at Bismark: Revs. Hoshin Fujikado, Ryūei Masuoka, Issei Matsuura, and myself. We did not, of course, have a single religious implement to use for Buddhist services. We did not have a tanjobutsu [baby Buddha statue], butsu-gu [Buddhist ritual implements], flowers, incense, or any implements used in the Hanamatsuri celebration.

Fortunately, we were with many people who were very clever with their hands. Arthur Yamabe 'borrowed' a carrot from the kitchen and carved a splendid image of the Buddha. Others made imitation flowers and all the other things used in our Hanamatsuri service, from the tissue used to wrap oranges and other fruit, and anything else they could get their hands on. With the carrot image of the Buddha in the center, we conducted the most impressive and moving Hanamatsuri service that I have ever participated in. The intense cold and the anxiety of being a prisoner of war was temporarily forgotten, and our minds and hearts were set at ease by a ritual that transcended time and space. I still celebrate Hanamatsuri every year, but that Hanamatsuri Service in Bismark is one that stands out in my memory.¹²

The Bismark "carrot Buddha" had counterparts in other camps: homemade Buddha statues crafted from desert wood, family Buddhist altars (*butsudan*) made from spare crate wood, and rosaries (*ojuzu*) strung together from dried peach pits that a Sōtō Zen priest collected over several months. It was here within these camps, surrounded by barbed wire and

armed guards, that Buddhist priests did their best to bring order to chaos, to create meaning in a seemingly senseless situation, and “to make the most of our circumstance” as Rev. Fujimura suggested. In the large WRA camps, Buddhist life revolved around barrack “churches” (some in mess halls or recreation buildings) that held religious services and offered religious education, particularly on Sundays.

Especially for the Issei, the Buddhist barrack church became a meaningful gathering place not only for the inspirational aspects of religious practice, but also because it was a place where their Japanese heritage was affirmed. For some Issei Buddhists, whose association with the Buddhist temple had been casual on the outside, camp became a place where such ties were strengthened, despite pressure from all sides to convert to Christianity as a means of demonstrating loyalty to America. A priest of the Kōyasan Shingon Buddhist mission, Rev. Ryōshō Sogabe, wrote from the Heart Mountain camp, Wyoming to fellow Shingon followers:

More than 100,000 fellow countrymen are now inevitably suffering from the evils of war and are compelled to lead a life which we had never imagined was possible. However, when we stop to think we will realize that this may be the real way of life. If we are to take into consideration the principle of uncertainty and transmigration of life and to repent for our sins and reflect on ourselves anew, we will see that now is the best moment to challenge ourselves.¹³

This optimistic approach to incarceration, as an ideal time to reflect on Buddhist teachings on the nature of life, was a consistent theme in many Issei Buddhist sermons.

In contrast to the long days of hard labor that many Issei fishermen and farmers had endured on the outside, having plenty of time and nothing to do contributed to high attendance at the barrack churches. But at the same time, it also reflected a loss of Issei status and leadership in the community. Leadership was increasingly assumed by English-speaking Nisei because the camp authorities preferred to deal with them. Depression was especially common among Issei men who lost their farms and businesses in the evacuation. It was to these Issei that the Nishi Honganji minister, Rev. Shinjō Nagatomi, directed his sermons, including this one from a Sunday service at the Manzanar Buddhist Church:

In one of the barracks, the residents thought it might be a good idea to pound rice cakes (*mochi*) for the New Year. This is a thought that surfaces which in Buddhist terminology we call “Vow” (*Gan*). However, for a thought to be actualized, action is necessary. This second condition is, in Buddhist terminology, called “Action” (*Gyō*). It is when thought and action come together that for the first

time, something can be accomplished.... For example, if one merely thinks, "I'd like some money," or "I want some food," while lying around in bed, money won't accumulate nor will one's stomach fill up. If you want money, you need to work. If you want some food, you need to take action and walk over to the mess hall. Only with action can one receive the \$16 monthly wage or fill one's stomach.... The great work that is Amida Buddha's salvation of all beings in this world is also something that is actualized through the coming together of "Vow" and "Action."¹⁴

Rev. Nagatomi's sermon urged those assembled at the Manzanar Buddhist Church to make the best of the difficult circumstances in which they found themselves. Rather than just "lying around in bed," he encouraged Issei to find a routine to help them pass the day and even earn a small amount of money by working. At the time, WRA monthly wages were \$12 for unskilled labor; \$16 for skilled; \$19 for professional work.

In addition to holding regular Sunday services and Dharma sermons, Buddhist priests focused on organizing the community around annual services such as Hanamatsuri (the Buddha's birthday) and the Obon (the summer ancestral memorial festival) with Bon Odori dancing. These traditional Japanese Buddhist celebrations were occasions for internees to celebrate not only their Buddhist heritage but their Japanese ethnic heritage as well. In respect to the observance of traditional Japanese Buddhist services, the tradition served as a source of moral and cultural resistance to the simplistic Americanization process encouraged by the WRA. The government's view of being American meant learning more English, converting to Christianity and joining organizations like the YMCA/YWCA, and emphasizing "American sports" like baseball and basketball over traditional "Japanese sports" like *sumō* and *jūdō*.

In addition to hosting community events, another major function of the barrack churches was in officiating life-cycle rituals, such as weddings and funerals, as the priests tried to give closure to the deaths and blessings to the new arrivals for families. Just as on the outside, funerals and memorial services in particular were occasions that brought Buddhist families together to remember their Japanese ancestral heritage. Funerals were common in camps such as Manzanar, especially in the first year among the very young and the very old (those most vulnerable to the harsh new conditions which were endured without adequate health care). Rev. Nagatomi oversaw most of these funerals and as a way of commemorating the lives of the departed, a non-sectarian campaign (which included Christians) was undertaken at Manzanar to build a memorial (an "Ireitō") by the 1943 Obon season. Fundraising for the monument was successful (at ten cents per family), and a white obelisk was constructed by Ryōzō Kado from concrete and placed in the Manzanar cemetery. The obelisk was inscribed by Rev.

Nagatomi with the three characters, "I-Rei-Tō" (A Monument for the Spirits of the Deceased). By the summer of 1943, this monument stood in memory of both ancestors and those who died in camp.¹⁵ In these ways, Buddhist priests provided not only a spiritual refuge for internees during these hard years, but also the social function of maintaining family and communal cohesion through ancestral, life-cycle, and traditional Japanese rituals.

In Rev. Tana's description of one Obon service held in the Army Lordsburg Detention Camp, we can again note how Buddhism as a vehicle for Japanese heritage produced complex loyalties among some Buddhist priests:

July 12, 1942: Bon Ceremony in the Desert

Not knowing how long the Japanese soldiers [captured after their boat was sunk off the coast of Alaska] interned here would remain, it was decided that we would hold this year's Bon ceremony [a little early] on the 12th. That a Bon ceremony (the annual summer ceremony for the ancestors) is being held here in the middle of [this American] desert with twenty-nine Buddhist priests and several hundred Japanese Buddhist laymen is surely a historical first. The saying *bukkyō tōzen* (the eastward transmission of Buddhism) has never seemed as apt as it does today.

This morning, I wrote out the words to the Buddhist hymn for later. The *sumi* ink that Mr. Oda Masami had sent came in handy. After setting up the Buddhist altar, we all recited the *Heart Sūtra* and the *Jūnirai*. Mr. Tega Yoshio served as the representative for the nine Japanese Navy prisoners of war and offered incense to the Buddha. That a Japanese military man could offer incense at our Bon ceremony in America was a true honor.

What must have gone through the mind of this navy man, Tega, who was offering incense at the first Bon ceremony (*Nii-Bon*) for a dozen or so of his fallen comrades, as well as for the spirits of all the imperial soldiers who had died to protect their country during the past five years of war? Observing Mr. Tega praying at the Buddha altar brought tears to my eyes. I will never forget this Urabon ceremony, and the fact that I was able to help in some small way will always be with me.

The Buddha altar was adorned simply with sagebrush and some artificial flowers [made from paper] donated by someone in a nearby barrack. Though it wasn't much, a new altarpiece was made just for the event. No one showed off and everyone sang in a selfless spirit accompanied the Buddhist hymns. This Bon ceremony in the desert gave me a glimpse of how Buddhism might shine at the end of the war.¹⁶

The importance in Buddhist practice of honoring the dead, especially within the first year of their death at the "Nii-Bon," can be seen here in Rev. Tana's diary entry. His emphasis on the participation of fellow prisoners who were imperial Japanese soldiers also highlights the high regard in which many Issei held the Japanese cause. The complex functions of loyalties toward Japan and America made clear by the fact that some of the very same priests who exhibited pro-Japanese tendencies also encouraged young Nisei to volunteer for the 100th Battalion / 442nd Regimental Combat Unit, the all-Nisei American unit in the European theater that earned the distinction of being the most highly decorated unit for its bravery in battle. For many Nisei joining the 100th/442nd or the MIS (the Military Intelligence Service operating in the Pacific theater), volunteering was understood as a chance to prove their loyalty to America and their "Americanness." In contrast, for some Issei, the fact that their children were volunteering for U.S. military service was an expression of what they understood to be the traditional Japanese sentiments of a samurai warrior's courage and loyalty in the face of adversity.

When news of the combat deaths of 442nd unit member Sgt. Kiyoshi Nakasaki and Pfc. Sadao Munemori reached their Buddhist parents imprisoned in Manzanar, it was Rev. Nagatomi who consoled the grieving parents and who later delivered the main address at the two soldiers' memorial service at the Manzanar Community Auditorium. He articulated conflicting feelings of loyalty and identity in his address. The translation here by Manzanar staff member Margaret D'Ille served as the official English version of the Japanese speech.

We are brought forth into this world as mankind and during this life it is better for us to sacrifice our living in attempt to accomplish a duty rather than to remain idle thru the countless years. If this sacrifice should occur at an early age in one's life and in the meanwhile it is considered a valuable accomplishment, death would not have been in vain. Death in this case would be like the beautiful and precious emeralds and diamonds that were broken into a thousand pieces. To those who are descendents of the Japanese race, but by birth citizens of any other nation, this duty of sacrifice has long been a traditional heritage and teachings of the Japanese people. [...] Today, we are gathered here at this Memorial Service being held in the honor of Sgt. Kiyoshi Nakasaki and PFC. Sadao Munemori under the sponsorship of the Manzanar USO and the residents of Manzanar. These two honored heroes of 25 and 22 years of age died in action on the battlefield of Italy on April 5, 1943. Although the lives of Sgt. Nakasaki and PFC. Munemori were brief (young and in the prime of their life) their struggles and sacrifices were dedicated to the teachings and traditions of the

Japanese people. We are gathered here without distinction of an Issei or a Nisei, but in behalf of the 110,000 Japanese people. [...]

We pray and trust that this small measure of deed contributed by the Nisei Servicemen to assist the American people in understanding and accepting our SPIRIT AND TRUTH for which WE stand. It is like one precious wheat seed sown to multiply itself into thousands and millions of good seeds. May this be the foundation for our future generation so that their children and their children may live in the United States of America having all the privileges and freedom of the democratic government—of the people, by the people, for the people—for which the brave Nisei soldiers have so unselfishly contributed their lives. [...]

To you, the family members and relatives of the deceased: Since the first day of the call for service of your sons and brothers I am sure you must have prepared yourself for this ill tiding news of your loved ones. With the official notices of their death, along with their enlarged pictures which enshrine at the altar taken while they were in active duty, you cannot help but recall the many childhood passing years of your beloved sons and the numerous memories left behind by them for you to cherish. It is repeatedly said that the last words of a dying soldier is “Dear Mother,” which must have been the very same words your sons may have cried. However, when you picture that moment, it must be harder for the Mothers to bear those words and scene than for the last moments of the soldier. Your sons’ life was a short one, but their holy and symbolic spirit of sacrifice now guide and help to preserve the nation’s freedom and justice. When the roar of guns cease and the fighting men come home once again, with your strong and determined belief let us continue to keep alive their dedication to the cause: “May the People of the world enjoy everlasting freedom and peace.”¹⁷

Rev. Nagatomi’s encouragement to those serving in the U.S. armed forces was counterbalanced with a gentle reminder to the Nisei not to forget their Japanese roots. Misue Nakamori Tamura remembers the words in a different sermon delivered by Rev. Nagatomi: “Nani shite mo/Doko itte mo/Nani atte mo/Kaeru no ko wa kaeru,” or “Whatever you do/Wherever you go/Whatever happens to you/Remember that a child of a frog is a frog.”¹⁸ While clearly encouraging the youth to explore the wider world in whatever way they desired, he hoped that they would remember that, just as a child of a frog was still a frog, the child of a Japanese person was still Japanese or—as he put it in his memorial service address—the children are “descendents of the Japanese race, but by birth citizens of any other nation.” Yet ultimately, for Rev. Nagatomi, the future of the Manzanar

Japanese lay in the United States, a future for which the Buddhist soldiers had sacrificed their lives.

When the war ended, many priests and their temple members returned home to the West Coast only to discover that many of their temples had been broken into or vandalized. Despite these immediate difficulties, Buddhist priests, younger Nisei, and their Caucasian friends helped to set up Buddhist temples as temporary hostels for the thousands of Japanese Americans returning to the West Coast without work or housing. The wartime experience was a serious blow to Japanese-American Buddhist temples as well as to the larger Japanese-American community. However, the lessons of the camps—endurance through hardship, creativity in scarcity, and courage in face of danger—served the community well in the post-war period.

NOTES

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2. Daishō Tana, *Santa Fe, Lordsburg yokuryūjo nikki, Vol. 1* (Tokyo: Sankibō Busshorin, 1976), pp. 1–2. The translation is mine.
3. Office of Naval Intelligence, Navy Department. Report to all Navy Districts, FBI, State Dept.: “Japanese Intelligence and Propaganda in the United States During 1941,” Dec. 4, 1941, pp. 23–24 (National Archives, A8-5).
4. The only studies by other scholars are: Susan Davis, “Mountain of Compassion: Dharma in American Internment Camps,” *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review* 2/4 (1993): pp. 46–51; Stephen Fujita and Marilyn Fernandez, “Religion and Japanese Americans’ Views of World War II Incarceration,” *Journal of Asian American Studies* 5/2 (2002): pp. 113–137; Akira Ichikawa, “A Test of Religious Tolerance: Canadian Government and Jodo Shinshu Buddhism During the Pacific War,” *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 26/2 (1994): pp. 46–69; a section of Testuden Kashima’s *Buddhism in America: The Social Organization of an Ethnic Religious Institution* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977); Eiko Masuyama, *Memories: The Buddhist Church Experience in the Camps, 1942–1945* (Los Angeles: Nishi Honganji Betsuin, 2003); Tara Ogden, *Gambarimashō! Religion Among the Japanese in America during World War II* (M.A. Thesis, University of California, Santa Barbara, 1995); Gary Okihiro, “Religion and Resistance in America’s Concentration Camps,” *Phylon: Review of Race and Culture* 45/3 (1984): pp. 220–233; Lester Suzuki, *Ministry in the Assembly and Relocation Centers in World War II* (Berkeley: Yardbird Publications, 1979); Kenneth Tanaka, “BCA: The Lotus that Bloomed Behind Barbed Wire,” *Turning Wheel* (Spring 1993): pp. 41–42; a section in David Yoo’s *Growing Up Nisei: Race, Generation, and Culture Among Japanese Americans of California, 1924–49* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000).
5. Duncan Ryūken Williams, “Camp Dharma: Japanese-American Buddhist Identity and the Internment Experience of World War II,” In *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia*, Charles Prebish and Martin Baumann, eds. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 191–200.

6. Daishō Tana, *Santa Fe, Lordsburg yokuryūjo nikki Vol. 1*, pp. 2–3.
7. Bunyū Fujimura, *Though I Be Crushed: The Wartime Experiences of a Buddhist Minister* (Los Angeles: The Nembutsu Press, 1995), pp. 45–46.
8. See, for example, proclamations issued by the Buddhist Mission of North America headquarters representative, Rev. Kenryū Kumata: “Register for Civilian Defense” on serving the country against Axis powers (Dec. 12, 1941; BCA Archives, Box 1B); “For Defense, Buy United States Savings Bonds and Stamps” which condemns the Pearl Harbor attack and shows solidarity with President Roosevelt (Dec. 15, 1941; BCA Archives, Box 1B); and “Your Red Cross Needs You” encouraging loyalty to the United States (Jan. 13, 1942; BCA Archives, Box 1B).
9. As cited and accompanied by a copy of the article in Bunyū Fujimura, *Though I Be Crushed*, p. 53.
10. Jōdoshū Kaigai Kaikyō no Ayumi Henshū Iinkai, ed. *Jōdoshū kaigai kaikyō no ayumi* (Tokyo: Jōdoshū kaikyō shinkō kyōkai, 1990), pp. 200–201. The translation is mine.
11. I only list the family name of the Buddhist priests here except in the cases where there is a need to distinguish repeated surnames.
12. Bunyū Fujimura, *Though I Be Crushed*, p. 64.
13. Kōno Kawashima, ed., *Kōyasan beikoku betsuin gojushūnenshi: Koyasan Buddhist Temple, 1912–1962* (Los Angeles: Kōyasan beikoku betsuin, 1974), pp. 183–84.
14. Shinjō Nagatomi, “Sunday Sermon” at Manzanar (n.d.), p. 5 (Nagatomi Family Collection). The translation is mine.
15. For more on the “Ireitō” campaign, see Eiko Masuyama, *Memories: The Buddhist Church Experience in the Camps, 1942–1945*, p. 33.
16. Daishō Tana, *Santa Fe, Lordsburg yokuryūjo nikki Vol. 1*, pp. 269–70. The translation is mine.
17. Found in Eiko Masuyama, *Memories*, pp. 75–77.
18. See Eiko Masuyama, *Memories*, p. 53. My translation differs slightly from the one found in the volume.