



Shogaku Zen Institute
shogakuzen.org

Asian Buddhist Communities in America:
Histories, Issues, and Bridging the Divides

Rev. Eric Daishin McCabe and Rev. Steve Kanji Ruhl, M.Div.

Class will meet on Zoom Wednesdays for 9 weeks

6-8 pm PST, 7-9 pm MST, 8-10 pm CST, 9-11 pm EST, October 6 - December 1

\$400, 2 Credits

Buddhism's arrival in America dates to the 19th century, and we owe it not only to white New England Transcendentalists but, crucially, to Chinese and Japanese immigrants, and to important Asian Buddhist teachers who addressed the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893. These trailblazing groups from China and Japan pioneered the entrance of Buddhism to this country and led the way for later Tibetans, Koreans, Vietnamese, and others. As a result, in the 20th and 21st centuries, robust communities of Asian Buddhists have flourished, alongside growing sanghas of non-Asian "convert" Buddhists.

Often, however, relations between the two groups have felt distant, characterized by a complex dynamic of mutual caution and wary tolerance. Moreover, contemporary American Buddhist popular media have, all too frequently, rendered Asian Buddhist communities invisible, focusing almost exclusively on the interests of predominantly white middle-class convert Buddhists.

Today, as we become more aware of each other, how can Asian and convert Buddhists resolve issues rooted, often, in misunderstanding and stereotypes, and how can we learn from each other?

In this course we will examine the history of Asian Buddhist immigration to America; the establishing of Buddhist teachers, temples, rituals, and communities here; their complicated success in maintaining Asian traditions (including Confucian) and accommodating American cultural values; their endurance through racial oppression and violence; the rich contributions of Asians to American Buddhism; and ways that we might identify and work to bridge some of the issues that often have kept our Buddhist communities apart.

The course will utilize assigned readings, lecture, guest teachers, videos, and extensive class discussion, and individual student contact with an Asian Buddhist community, in person (if possible) or online. Written reflection and research papers will be required.

NOTE: The facilitators of this forum, Daishin and Kanji (both white) recognize our responsibility as white people to explore our own enactment of racist beliefs about Asian Americans that inform and shape our community. This is an aspect of studying the self --and in doing this study, Asian Americans are not obligated to teach white people about their own prejudices. Most of our current Shogaku students are people who identify as white, and so we are offering to facilitate an open examination of Buddhism and misconceptions of Asian culture, a discussion to which, of course, everyone is invited.

Readings:

How the Swans Came to the Lake: A Narrative History of Buddhism in America, Rick Fields

American Sutra: A Story of Faith and Freedom in the Second World War, Duncan Ryuken Williams

Heartwood: The First Generation of Theravada Buddhists in America, Wendy Cadge

Confucius: The Secular as Sacred, Herbert Fingarette

The Analects of Confucius, Roger T. Ames

Zen Ritual, Dale Wright

Crooked Cucumber: The Life and Zen Teachings of Shunryu Suzuki, David Chadwick (relevant excerpt as handout to class)

Video:

“May We Gather: A National Buddhist Memorial Ceremony for Asian American Ancestors”