

SOCIALLY ENGAGED BUDDHISM AMONG THE IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE COMMUNITIES IN SOUTHERN UNITED STATES

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the phenomena of 'Engaged Buddhism' with a set of immigrant and refugee communities in Southern United States. Reflecting on 15 years of work with a Vietnamese Buddhist community in the rural southern area of the United States, the author is taking an (auto) ethnographic view of how Buddhist leaders engage in cultural preservation and community building. The immigration and rebuilding of the Vietnamese in US had a concrete context of segregation laws. Segregation laws were proposed as part of a deliberate effort to drive a wedge between poor whites and African Americans. These segregation laws helped maintain a caste system based on wealth (that is affluent whites against poor whites) and a caste system based on race (that is whites against blacks).

Fusing ideas of Engaged Buddhism and Social work, the author demonstrates how a Buddhist monk is able to navigate the broader American culture and assist Vietnamese immigrants and refugees to acculturate, while maintaining their own cultural heritage, beliefs and religious traditions; ultimately building a viable and sustainable Buddhist community.

Keywords: ***Engaged Buddhism, Social Work, Community Building, Vietnamese Buddhism***

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Introduction

I was born in 1968 in rural North Carolina, just two days before Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated and right after the Tét Offensive in Vietnam – considered the ‘climax of the war against the Americans’ (Dutton, Werner and Whitmore 2012: 448). This area was sequestered from the rest of the world and our diversity consisted of white and black individuals who had grown up in the same region. Even given this limited option to diversity, as an adult I have spent the better part of the past 15 years working very closely with Vietnamese Buddhists in our area, even at one point living at a Vietnamese Buddhist temple for several months studying as a novice monk.

As detached as these rural communities are, global socio-political events do not happen in a vacuum, and globalisation impacts every corner of the world. According to The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 2010 Global Trends Report more than 43 million people are displaced worldwide, including 15.4 million refugees (UNHCR 2010). After fleeing their country of origin, refugees often have to wait indefinitely in their host country to find out where and when they can resettle permanently. Many refugees must wait years before they can find a permanent home and start rebuilding their lives. In 2010, 7.2 million (68%) of the 10.55 million refugees under the mandate of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) had been waiting in exile for five years or longer, and some refugees have been waiting for 30 years. When groups finally begin to resettle in western countries, such as the United States, they bring with them their cultural and religious values and norms (UNHCR 2010).

Over the years this international migration has had a huge impact on the mostly rural state of North Carolina. Former director of The Center for New North Carolinians, Bailey (2005: 57) notes, ‘in the early 1990s, North Carolina began to witness a dramatic influx of immigrants. The foreign-born population increased by 273.6 percent between 1990 and 2000, growing from 115077 to 430000 residents.’ North Carolina, especially in Greensboro where I reside, was designated as a refugee resettlement area, because of, ‘1) a robust labour market’ and, ‘2) a federally funded programme that settled refugees in selected parts of the state.’

Most people in the United States of America (USA or US) do not understand the complexity and nuances of international migration. Americans overall have a tendency to be globally illiterate and our understanding of other cultures is very limited. Southeast Asia is often seen as an ‘Oriental’ area with all Asians considered as one cultural and ethnic group. Our understanding of Vietnam mainly stems from the country’s involvement in the region during the Vietnam War. For the Vietnamese, their struggle for national and ideological independence began in 1946, when they fought their French

Colonial oppressors, finally defeating the French in 1954. This struggle was actually the culmination of over one hundred years of resentment over colonial oppression. Many Americans are unaware, even, of this part of Vietnamese history (Osborne 2013: 189).

The impact of the Vietnam War was profound and according to the Encyclopedia Britannica (Spector 2015) it is estimated that 1.1 million Vietnamese lost their lives in this conflict. This does not include the devastating aftermath and suffering inflicted on Vietnamese who were considered 'sympathetic' to the US during the war. According to Taylor (2013: 614) after the US withdrew troops from Vietnam,

'Many Second Republic officials were killed and hundreds of people were sent to concentration camps, ostensibly to re-educate them to live in a socialist society. A system of registering the population was instituted to ensure that those whose families had supported the Second Republic were penali[s]ed by denial of employment, education, and food rations.'

It is not uncommon for older Buddhist monks in this country to have served in these 're-education' camps. Thích Thiện Quãng, the founding monk of the temple I will discuss later, Chùa An Lạc, spent five years in one of these camps.

The ending of the Vietnam War ushered the beginning of an exodus of Vietnamese subjected to persecution. For the United States, the multiple waves of political refugees from Vietnam that followed became the largest refugee resettlement program [me] in American history (Ho and Dang 2012: 351). This had a profound impact on the United States and its ability to take in, and provide services for refugees.

'Before 1960, the National Origins system severely restricted immigration of Asians to America. The 1965 Immigration and Nationalities Act under President Johnson, with its new preference and quota system, allowed more Asians to be accepted into the U.S. The American Civil Rights Movement (1955 – 1968) abolished much outright racial discrimination. The Vietnamese were lucky to arrive in the wake of these historical developments' (Ho and Dang 2012: 353).

Starting in 1975, 130000 people came (to the US) and consisted of the well-educated and professionals who were more urban and westernised (Ho and Dang 2012: 351). This refugee population increased over the years, where, 'in the late seventies and early eighties, a diverse group of more than 500000 "boat people" arrived,' including, 'educated professionals as well as fishermen, farmers, and storekeepers' as well as former political prisoners (Ho and Dang 2012: 352)

By 2000, there were 1122528 Vietnamese in the United States, and by 2011 1737433 (0.5% of the US population and a 38% increase from 2000 to 2010) (Ho and Dang 2012: 349). With this dramatic increase, Vietnamese have become an integral part of US culture and society. More than just being 'Asians,' Vietnamese arrive with unique cultural, religious and personal identities. Westerners, coming from a very narrow, Orientalist perspective of Southeast Asia, often confuse and conflate Asians, and specifically Southeast Asian culture. A primary example of this is the difference in the Buddhist Traditions, where Vietnam practices Mahāyāna Buddhism, heavily influenced from China, whereas Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and Burma all practice Theravāda Buddhism, heavily influenced by India. As Osborne (2013: 44) notes, 'Vietnam differed from other major states of Southeast Asia' noting the heavy influence of Chinese culture on Vietnam, as opposed to Indian for the rest of Southeast Asia.

With any group of people coming to the US, there is always a dynamics between acculturation and assimilation. The need to maintain cultural and religious identity in another country always becomes a challenge. Not all groups are able to acculturate well, and the problem with assimilating is the purging of one's own cultures, values and beliefs to fit in the dominant culture. For most Vietnamese I worked with, there has been an emphasis on the need to acculturate to American culture and way of life, yet hold on to Vietnamese values and beliefs. As Nguyen et. al. (2001: 263) notes,

'Vietnamese Buddhists were Vietnamese first and foremost, and thus shared the national agony with their countrymen...intelligent Buddhist leaders attempted to fuse inherent Buddhist concepts of compassion and benevolence with new ideas capable of provoking the masses to resist the foreign invaders, and protect their national and native religion.'

Given this very brief history of the Vietnamese and their plight in this country, I want to reflect on the historical context of what has happened in the United States leading up to Vietnamese refugees coming. During the conflict in Vietnam, the US was undergoing major social and political changes here. It is helpful to gain a slight understanding of these socio-political changes, and the religious dynamics of the region that I am focusing on in this paper.

US Historical Context

The migration of Southeast Asians during the seventies came during a very tumultuous time for the United States and the South in particular. Racial, political and religious factors need to be considered when reflecting on the mass migration of Vietnamese to this country. Race relations in US have always been contentious. This was even more so in the Southern regions, where slavery was common up until the end of the Civil War in 1867.

After the Civil War, a reconstruction period had shown some promise in providing systems for the education to former African American slaves and establishing equality. In 1867, at the dawn of the Reconstruction Era, no black man held political office in the South, yet three years later, at least 15 percent of all Southern elected officials were black (Alexander 2012: 29). Eventually the weight and cost of maintaining this external Northern force in the South proved costly and politically unfavourable. After the removal of forces that were in place to help maintain the integrity of the reconstruction, racist ideology and white supremacy (mostly led by affluent white landowners) began to take hold. Legislators passed 'Jim Crow' laws to legally segregate blacks and deny them their legal rights. As Alexander (2012) notes, Segregation laws were proposed as part of a deliberate effort to drive a wedge between poor whites and African Americans. These segregation laws helped maintain a caste system based on wealth (that is affluent whites against poor whites) and a caste system based on race (that is whites against blacks).

After World War (WW) II, African Americans were coming back to a country still divided and segregated based on race. After fighting against fascism in Europe, the prospect of continuing to be relegated to second-class citizenship was not very popular for African Americans and the slow and steady struggle for civil rights began. Cultural struggles ensued, focusing its energy on the South, its oppressive segregation laws, and overt racist ideology. Starting in the 1950s, the Civil Rights movement fought against segregation, white supremacy and for equal rights for African Americans. The Southern region of US fought back vehemently and even today maintains the caste systems based on race, even though laws were eventually put in place to protect the rights of minorities.

It is important to reflect on these issues because these are overarching political, social and cultural issues that were hanging over the area when Vietnamese Buddhist began to come to this region. Along with these ongoing racist sentiments, Greensboro and the South are considered as part of the 'Bible Belt.' The Bible Belt is a region stretching across the southern portion of the United States, towards the mid-west. Individuals in these areas strongly identify with a very conservative form of Christianity, and this form of Christianity justified slavery, and later segregation, and apartheid. It is also a form of Christianity that has little respect for other religious tradition and will often look down upon other beliefs. 'Witnessing' is a common practice among the adherents of this religious tradition, where members profess ones own religious beliefs and values to others, with the sole purpose and intent to convert others to their form of the Christian faith. Instead of respecting and valuing other faiths, traditions and beliefs, white conservative Christians feel it is their moral obligation to ascertain a person's belief, and if need, convert that person to a specific form of Christian tradition.

Socially Engaged Buddhism

As noted earlier in the paper, Vietnam, though part of Southeast Asia, differs dramatically from the rest of the region both culturally and religiously (Osborne 2013). Being heavily influenced by Chinese culture, the form of Buddhism in Vietnam is Mahāyāna (which means the Great Vehicle) as opposed to other Southeast Asian countries, where the form of Buddhism is Theravāda (which means School of the Elders) (Robinson and Johnson 2010). Although this can be very nuanced to Westerners, there are specific and unique differences between the two traditions, and this impacts how Buddhism shapes itself and adapts with immigrant and refugee populations. It also impacts how individuals, especially Buddhist leadership, approach cultural and social issues when attempting to navigate a dominant culture.

Mahāyāna distinguishes itself based on the Bodhisattva ideal, the Bodhisattva being an enlightened being who remains in Saṃsāra (repeated rebirth) with the intention to help others who are suffering (Buswell and Lopez 2014). Monks, nuns and lay individuals in the Mahāyāna tradition will take Bodhisattva vows. Though both traditions place a heavy emphasis on compassion (Karuṇā) and non-violence (Ahimsā), Mahāyāna Buddhists take the vows of the Bodhisattva very seriously and feel the obligation to help others who are suffering (Buswell and Lopez 2014). Many Vietnamese Buddhist temples are named after the Bodhisattva of Compassion, Chùa Quan Âm (Chùa is Vietnamese for Temple or Pagoda, and Quan Âm is Vietnamese for Avalokiteśvara, or the Bodhisattva of Compassion). For many followers of Mahāyāna Buddhism, Buddhism is an engagement with others, as opposed to being a meditation practice to attain enlightenment.

Vietnam has a long history of conflict and struggle and before the US engagement in the country the Vietnamese dealt with colonial powers and occupation by Japan and France. During this time in geo-political history, the United States and the Soviet Union were imperialistic powers and their ideological struggles were often played out in smaller, developing countries. The United States responded to the Soviet Union's involvement with the rest of the world by means of a foreign policy known as 'containment.' This theory of 'containment' was basically to prevent communism from spreading throughout the world, but in a lot of ways it established the United States own imperialistic boundaries (D. Harvey 2003: 40). Through containment Vietnam became a protracted war for the United States lasting over ten years, resulting in numerous deaths on both sides. The ideas of Engaged Buddhism were forged in the battlefield that was Vietnam.

The term 'Engaged Buddhism' was coined by the Vietnamese Buddhist Monk Thích Nhất Hạnh in relation to the work that he and other Buddhists were doing during the Vietnam War (Kraft 1996: 64-65). Thích Nhất Hạnh also

introduced its implications to the West (Queen and King 1996: 2). This form of Buddhism is an ‘engagement’ in life as opposed to a rejection of worldly affairs. Historically monastic traditions have been perceived as a way to separate oneself from the world and worldly concerns. Since Buddhism has a strong monastic tradition, monks and nuns have been viewed as more concerned with their own spiritual development than being of assistance to others. As Kraft (1996) notes, ‘Buddhism has been seen as passive, otherworldly, or escapist.’ The Vietnam War however forced monks and nuns of the Buddhist tradition to become more engaged in worldly affairs and help those that were harmed during the conflict.

Thích Nhất Hạnh was a Buddhist monk who embodied this notion of Engaged Buddhism, and connected it to what we in the West would consider to be ‘social work.’ During his work in Vietnam, Thích Nhất Hạnh created the School of Youth for Social Services in 1964, ‘which trained social workers to rebuild bombed villages’ (Fields 1992: 357). Engaged Buddhism consisted of activities such as feeding the poor, caring for children whose parents were killed because of the hostilities and advocating for peace. Ultimately, Vietnamese who were guided by these principles of Mahāyāna Buddhism’s social engagement brought these ideas with them as they immigrated to the US and began forming Buddhist communities.

Methodology

Methodology is an important component of any research. With quantitative research, even in social work and human services, we sometimes tend to get bogged down in numbers, eschewing the human element. Having worked with communities for close to 20 years, I always rely on research methodology to guide my work and provide context in how I approach problems. For my work and research with the Vietnamese Buddhist community, I draw from the research methodologies of action research and critical ethnography.

Whereas ethnography is the detached view of others, critical ethnography, which includes (auto) ethnography, is a dialogue with yourself and others (Madison 2012: 10). (Auto) ethnography goes beyond the ‘observer’ position of traditional ethnography and becomes a ‘critical ethnography.’ As Madison (2012: 10) states, ‘I contend that critical ethnography is always a meeting of multiple sides in an encounter with and among others, one in which there is negotiation and dialogue toward substantial and viable meanings that make a difference in others’ worlds.’ I also believe that (auto)ethnography is an advantageous form of methodology to use in this arena since (auto)ethnography is a ‘blurred genre, it overlaps with, and is indebted to, research and writing practices in anthropology, sociology, psychology, literary criticism, journalism and communication’ (Jones 2005: 765).

I also engage in the ongoing process of action research in my work with communities. Whereas traditional research is done *on* groups, action research is done in conjunction *with* groups.

‘Action research, however, requires researchers to actively participate in the research process, not as an expert who *does* research on people but as a resource person. He or she becomes a facilitator or consultant who acts as a catalyst to assist stakeholders to define their problems clearly and to monitor and support their activity as they work toward effective resolution of the issues that provide the focus of their investigations’ (Stringer 2014: 20).

With this methodology and approach, my role as an expert and researcher are limited and what I receive from the community is just as important as what the community receives from me.

Case Study: A Vietnamese Buddhist Temple in the South

Thích Thiện Quảng was the first Vietnamese Buddhist monk I met in Greensboro, which was around 1998. He was the head monk of a temple named Chùa Quan Âm and had just taken on a novice monk Thường Lực (his Buddhist name which means ‘permanent strength’ or strong determination). Thường Lực was a young Vietnamese refugee who migrated to this area at the age of 19, after his father. Thường Lực’s father had been one of the original ‘boat people’ to escape Vietnam. After serving with the South Vietnamese army, the family had to endure persecution after the war. Surviving the ordeal of escaping, Thường Lực’s father stayed in a refugee camp until he was able to obtain refugee status and make it to the US. Settling in High Point, a city next to Greensboro, he worked towards bringing the rest of his family to the US.

Thường Lực was in his mid-twenties when he decided to start his training as a Buddhist monk. After a couple of years as head monk at Chùa Quan Âm, Thích Thiện Quảng decided to move to High Point, NC, a smaller city next to Greensboro, and start a Buddhist temple there. By this time, the area’s Vietnamese community was growing larger and it was apparent that more than one temple was needed. Thích Thiện Quảng and his novice monk, Thường Lực, started off in a small, two-bedroom, efficiency apartment, and began their search for a space suitable to start a temple. Six months after their initial move to High Point, they were able to find an inexpensive, two-bedroom house in a convenient location, residing in this home as the primary occupants.

A Vietnamese Buddhist temple forming in residential areas is not uncommon in certain areas of the county, especially more rural ones. This speaks to the challenges that Vietnamese refugees face in developing a community centre that serves multiple purposes, especially in locations not zoned as property for religious institutions. These dwellings serve multiple purposes, with monks

and nuns living in them as well as functioning as a Buddhist temple and community centre. Both Thích Thiện Quảng and Thường Lực were relatively savvy when it came to navigating all the municipal guidelines, but they still needed to learn what was appropriate for an area such as this. An example of this was after they moved into the house. This was part of a rural area of High Point, but the street was a thoroughfare between two parts of the town, so received heavy traffic. As a way to let local Vietnamese immigrants know where the temple was, Thích Thiện Quảng and Thường Lực decided to put a large sign with the temple's name in the front yard beside the street. Shortly after this they received a notice from the city that signs of this nature were not allowed in the front yard, since this was zoned as a residential area.

The location becomes important when Vietnamese are attempting to find an area to start a Buddhist temple. This region of the country historically is conservative ideologically and radically Christian. Strangers are often viewed with suspicion and other religious traditions are not well accepted or welcomed. In moving to this location the monks were able to secure a place that was relatively remote, which gave space between the house and other houses, but off a major thoroughfare, which made it easy to find and access. The house was offset from the road, up on a hill; with a relatively larger back and side yard area. This provided a natural 'buffer' between the temple and the neighbours around them. During the week, the residence served as a home for the monks, with a few people visiting periodically. On Sundays, there were traditional services, which allowed individuals to come together and worship, as well as maintain cultural identity. This need to maintain a cultural identity is very important with Vietnamese, especially when it comes to passing this identity on to their children. As Ho and Dang note (2012: 360)

Vietnamese church or pagoda (Chùa) meetings also serve as public forums where moral and ethical values are discussed, in contrast to mainstream media or secular public schools where the needs of a particular minority cannot be addressed. With this structure, the Vietnamese community has a considerable amount of control over its members.

Right after Thích Thiện Quảng and Thường Lực moved into the house (in the beginning of 2000) that I decided to become an AmeriCorps member through the Centre for New North Carolinians. AmeriCorps is like a domestic Peace Corps and members are able to serve in local communities as opposed to traveling overseas to serve. The AmeriCorps ACCESS (Accessing Cross Cultural Education Service System) project was a programme serving out of the UNC-Greensboro's Centre for New North Carolinians (CNNC). Greensboro was designated as a refugee resettlement area back in the 1980s, and the AmeriCrops ACCESS project was formed in 1994, in conjunction with UNC-Greensboro's Social Work department, to address the needs of refugee resettlement in the area. AmeriCorps ACCESS's overall mission is, 'to help

immigrant and refugee communities gain better access to human services, become economically self-sufficient and build bridges of understanding between immigrant and mainstream communities' (CNNC 2015).

AmeriCorps members are volunteers who serve either a one or two year commitment, working in community based organisations that specifically assist immigrant and refugees in the area. Because of my connection with the University, CNNC and Chùa An Lạc Buddhist temple, I was able to do my AmeriCorps service directly with the temple. By the time I started serving as an AmeriCorps member I had been associated with the Vietnamese Buddhist community for three years. Being able to connect this community, especially during this period of establishing a new temple, with organisations such as the CNNC and AmeriCorps, would be beneficial for the sustainability and viability of the temple. With my background in social work and my training with the AmeriCorps programme, the monks and I spent the year of 2000 to 2001 establishing the Buddhist temple and started working with the Vietnamese Buddhist refugees in developing it into a community centre. Working with AmeriCorps and the CNNC, I was able to access resources that could help us navigate the complex issues of establishing a religious organisation while helping the community acculturate to life in the US.

Acculturation is a complex issue with immigrants and refugees, especially in raising children, learning the language, and navigating cultural norms. Westerners often engage in forms of cultural appropriation that is not always respectful of ethnic groups attempting to acculturate into a dominant culture and Buddhism often becomes the 'religion *de jour*' for many 'seeking' Americans. This appropriation without fully understanding the tradition is what Sölle (2001) called the 'fast food spirituality... Many of them change gurus, groups, and rituals often – first precious stones, then deep breathing!'

Mainstream American media is replete with racial stereotypes of 'Orientals' and as noted earlier in my paper Asians are often conflated into one ethnic and racial group. I would often be out in the community with both Thích Thiện Quảng and Thường Lực while they were wearing their traditional Vietnamese Buddhist monk clothing and people would approach them, enquiring if they were 'Shaolin monks' or knew Kung Fu. They always handled these situations with a little more equanimity than I did and often my frustration towards my fellow American's cultural illiteracy was visible. Part of my struggle with the work that I have done has been to balance respecting their culture, values and beliefs (as well as learning from them) while helping them understand American culture and how to establish themselves as newly arrived citizens. This, of course, has not always been easy.

Some of the tasks that I attempted to implement as a part of my AmeriCorps duties, was establish both ESOL (English as Secondary to the Original Language) and Citizenship classes. There was resistance to the structure of

both of these classes by the Vietnamese participants. Not because they were uninterested in the classes, they were just not interested in *engaging* in the classes. What the community members who attended these sessions wanted was to only memorise the citizenship test with the belief that was all they needed to pass and become citizens. This is actually a common problem when organizing citizenship courses for refugees. One can conceivably pass the citizenship test without actually knowing the language, but the overall testing process is more complicated. Along with the written portion of the test, an individual has to be interviewed by an Immigration and Naturalisation Service (INS) representative. This interview may consist of just a simple conversation, or the INS interviewer may request that the interviewee write a coherent and comprehensive English sentence, demonstrating their mastery of the language. This is where most Vietnamese refugees failed their citizenship test. They were able to memorise and answer the questions on the test, but they were unable to communicate clearly in English with the INS official.

I had the privilege of taking Thích Thiện Quãng to INS for his citizenship interview. Thích Thiện Quãng was a very bright individual who had received a master's degree in Vietnam during the war, and his ability to write English was very good. His ability to speak it, on the other hand, was not as good. This concerned me when I took him to the INS office, but I was pleased that he managed to pass the process, including the interview with the INS official. He told me on the ride back to the temple that he was able to pass because he had no choice but to speak and practice English around me. As important as it is for those of us working with immigrant and refugee populations to try and learn their language and culture, we must not underestimate the importance of conversing with those individuals who really do need to practice and develop their English skills. Our roles as cultural brokers are not only to educate the community about the culture we are connected with, but also to educate individuals in immigrant and refugee groups to become as acculturated to the dominant culture.

The sustainability and prosperity of the temple has to be attributed to the leadership of Thích Thiện Quãng and Thường Lực, as well as the commitment of the lay individuals who see the temple as part of their home. Having taught both community building and community organising as a professor, I struggle with students in teaching that there is no real 'formula' to build and sustain a community. It really is all about personal connections. As Hạnh (1996: 199) notes, 'interpersonal relationships are the key to the practice.' Buddhism is based on three principles, the Buddha (the original teacher), the Dharma (the teachings that the Buddha promulgated) and the Saṅgha (originally defined as the community of monks and nuns and their followers, now the Saṅgha represents a community of Buddhist practitioners). This notion of community, Saṅgha, is an essential part of the Buddha's

teaching and is an important part of ones Buddhist practice to make the community viable.

This does not mean that immigrant and refugee Buddhist communities do not come with their conflicts and challenges. As Hạnh (1996: 196-97) again notes,

‘Every Sangha has its problems. Its natural. If you suffer because you do not have confidence in your Sangha and feel on the verge of leaving, I hope you will make the effort to continue. You do not need a perfect Sangha. An imperfect one is good enough. We do our best to transform the Sangha by transforming ourselves into a positive element of the Sangha, accepting the Sangha, and building on it. The principle is to organi[s]e the Sangha in a way that is enjoyable for everyone.’

The ability to navigate and negotiate conflict is an important component of community building. In essence, it is what builds community. M. Scott Peck believed that you cannot have community without conflict and without conflict you only have a pseudo-community (1998). Thích Thiện Quảng and Thường Lực’s ability to deal with conflict directly and appropriately helped to sustain and grow the community. Their drive to make the temple an inclusive community has always been essential in its success. This inclusivity involves the mutually shared interest of the community. Vietnamese are very proud of their culture, heritage and religion. ‘Community comfort is reinforced by a sense of identity and ethnic nationalism, which prevents the middle class from moving away from the less privileged and the new arrivals from Vietnam’ (Ho and Dang 2012: 361). As successive generations of Vietnamese become blended with American culture, more Americans have been coming to the temple with their new Vietnamese family members. This balance of maintaining culture, values and norms, as well as welcoming those from other traditions has made the temple a rich, diverse and vibrant community to this day.

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