Reviving the Lotus: Japanese Buddhism and World War II Internment

LINDA NISHIGAYA
ERNEST OSHIRO

ABSTRACT

The World War II internment of American civilians and resident aliens of Japanese ancestry at Honouliuli Internment and POW Camp in Central O'ahu, Hawai'i included mostly male leaders in the Japanese immigrant community. Religious leaders, especially those identified as Buddhist priests, figured prominently among those detained. The religious designation of Buddhist/Buddhism and the ethnic/racial category of Japanese were commonly viewed as synonymous and membership in either was cause for suspicion and internment. Buddhist priests numbered among the first civilians of Japanese ancestry to be arrested and detained, many until the end of the war. Most of the priests were transferred to one of the internment camps on the US mainland and records indicate that only seven were interned at Honouliuli for any length of time. The internment of the Buddhist priests at Honouliuli and other camps on the US mainland severely curtailed Buddhist religious services and activities in the Hawaiian Islands. On a larger scale, its effects on the future of Buddhism in Hawai'i and the US mainland were institution and life changing. This paper examines Buddhism and World War II internment and the aftermath of the war and uses rational choice theory to clarify the decisions and changes that followed.

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The unearthing of the World War II internment and POW camp at Honouliuli in Central O'ahu, Hawai'i uncovers a dark and painful past of more than 2,000 (Rosenfeld 2011) local American civilians and resident aliens of Japanese ancestry who were interned, as well as an immigrant community left bereft of most of its religious, business, educational, and cultural leaders. Immediately after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, among the first detained by FBI agents were religious leaders, especially Shintō and Buddhist priests, who were targeted as being dangerous and subversive. These ministers were high on the FBI's priority list of potential enemy aliens (Kashima 2003, 2008; Williams 2002, 2003). Their internment changed the structure and practice of Buddhism in Hawai'i and the US mainland.

The literature on religion in general and Buddhism, its priests and congregations in particular, in relation to World War II internment is scant. Tangentially and anecdotally, stories of religious activities in the camps and in the Japanese communities in Hawai'i during the war years have been told, but serious study of the role of the Buddhist religion as a major institution of the Japanese has been largely bypassed. Thus, our understanding of its influence, evolution, suppression, and revival is limited.

Koda (2003) contends that “While no one theory can explain Japanese religion in Hawaii, theories such as acculturation, assimilation, Americanization, and cultural pluralism all have roots in the Japanese American religious story” (p. 238). Smith and Froese’s (2008) connection of Buddhist scholarship to Warner’s (1993) “new religious paradigm” juxtaposed with the “old religious paradigm” offers insight into the dynamics of Buddhist religiosity in the lives of its adherents and in an ever-changing society. In brief, the old paradigm assumes that individuals follow cultural and social tradition by taking for granted the religious identity, beliefs, and practices of their social group. In contrast, the new paradigm assumes rational choice, that is, that individuals act by weighing the costs and benefits of religious choices, such as membership and extent of participation. While we do not intend to enter the ongoing debate of the efficacy of the old versus the new paradigm, or the theoretical discussion of which of many perspectives best accounts for the accumulating religious research data, we do recognize the contribution that a conceptual framework that fits the data can make. The discovery of unifying concepts can help to integrate existing religious research data and generate new ways of thinking about and investigating religious behavior.
A retrospective analysis of the history of Buddhism in Hawai‘i suggests the relevancy of the new paradigm in helping to explain Buddhism in the early plantation economy and its adaptation to the conditions in the emerging and modern service economy. The rational choice model objectively considers costs and benefits, competition, and constraints in explaining the choices made by suppliers (e.g., ministers) and demanders (e.g., lay followers) of religious and other services on the individual, group, and societal levels (Iannaccone 1995). It provides awareness of and insight into the difficult choices that confronted interned Buddhist priests and their congregations with respect to loyalty, institutional changes, and other critical issues. The tragic experience of World War II internment had far-reaching effects on Japanese Buddhism in Hawai‘i and the US mainland. An understanding of its impact illuminates the path taken by Japanese Buddhism from the past to the present and offers insight into its future direction.

The Powerful Influence of Buddhism in Pre–World War II Hawai‘i

At the time America was thrust into World War II after the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, Buddhism in Hawai‘i was thriving. There were over 180 temples or shrines on O‘ahu and the neighbor islands, ministered by well over 100 active priests from over a dozen different Buddhist traditions (Hunter 1971; Williams 2003). (See Tables 1 and 2). The temple congregations were larger then than they have ever been since. Most of the Japanese immigrants identified themselves as Buddhists, with more than a majority affiliating themselves with the Jōdo Shinshū sect. The Buddhist temples in Hawai‘i kept ties with their religious headquarters in Japan and the hierarchical organizational structure with priests at the top was in keeping with Japanese tradition. The Japanese language was spoken at religious services as the congregations were mostly first generation Japanese (Issei) and their bilingual second generation young adult children (Nisei) (Yosemori 2011). Although efforts to convert the Japanese immigrants and their children to Christianity were not lacking in the Hawaiian Islands, most adhered to Buddhism.

The powerful influence of Buddhism in the lives of the Japanese in Hawai‘i in the pre–World War II years was duly recognized even by the Office of the Provost Marshal General, Army Service Forces. “While religion was a strong centralizing factor on the Pacific Coast, it was probable [sic] secondary to the Japanese consulate domination of social, political, and semi-military organizations. In Hawai‘i the Buddhist Church is a much stronger controlling element” (Office 1946a). More than any other institution, the Buddhist religion
played an active and influential role in Japanese immigrant communities. For immigrants in a new and foreign land, Buddhism provided more than spiritual sustenance and support. Especially in the rural sugar plantations, more than simply places of worship, the temples functioned as community centers fulfilling spiritual, economic, social, educational, and cultural needs (Horinouchi 1973; Bloom 1998; Koda 2003; Tanabe n.d.). A priority of most temples was to provide Japanese language instruction to the children of the immigrants who numbered in the tens of thousands (Asato 2012).

From the arrival of the first Buddhist missionary priest in 1889 and into pre–World War II, the prevailing perceptions of Buddhism were clearly nega-

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Total               | 57      | 20     | 2      | 25   | 1       | 77    | 182         |
tive among the largely Christian population and even some of the Japanese Christians in the Hawaiian Islands. In the minds of the non-Japanese Christian community, Buddhism was associated with and even thought to be synonymous with Shinto. In 1868, after the collapse of Japan's feudal regime, Shinto was made the state religion in an effort to forge a nation with unconditional loyalty to the Emperor who was considered divine. In Hawai'i, Japanese Buddhism and its followers were feared to be intimately tied to Japanese nationalism. In addition, being Buddhist was equated to being un-American and therefore a threat to national security (Hunter 1971; Okihiro 1991). Military intelligence

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**Table 2**

**Number of Buddhist and Shintō Priests in Hawai'i in 1941, by Sect and Island**

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**Total** | 4 | 35 | 14 | 3 | 17 | 1 | 75 | 149

Sources: Hawai'i Hongwanji Ministers' Association (1991); Hayashi (2012); Box 228 (1945); Box 257 (1945); Box 293 (1945); Box 305 (1945); Box 2632 (1945); Soga (2008); and Williams (2003, n.d.- a, n.d.- b, n.d.- c).
reported Buddhism, along with the Japanese government via its consulate, and the Japanese language schools, as primary sources of anti-Americanism at least two decades before America's war with Japan (Okihiro 1991). The unfounded suspicions of espionage, sabotage, and subversion that surrounded Buddhism and especially its priests nevertheless placed them high on the FBI's custodial detention list of threats to the internal security of the United States in the event of war.

Thus, when the United States declared war against Japan after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, all but a handful of Japanese Buddhist priests were taken from their temple communities and interned in Department of Justice (DOJ), US Army, or War Relocation Authority (WRA) camps, leaving Hawai'i's Buddhist congregations stripped of their leaders. Nearly 100 percent of the active Shintō and Buddhist priests as a category, not selectively, were interned. Unbeknownst to these priests in Hawai'i, nearly all of them had been placed on custodial detention lists that were compiled by the FBI and other military intelligence agencies as early as 1938 through 1941 (Daniels 1994; Kashima 2003). The priests were multiply jeopardized: Most were Issei (more than 90 percent were first generation), Japanese citizens (1924 US law denied them citizenship), educated in Japan, spoke Japanese, and found to engage in activities deemed suspicious, for example, donating funds to the Japanese Red Cross or to the Japanese military campaign in Asia (Kashima 2003; Williams 2003). As a result, they were in the vanguard of those arrested, interrogated, and interned.

Under J. Edgar Hoover's nationwide "Alien Enemy Control" program, Japanese, Germans, Italians, and other potential enemies in Hawai'i and the US mainland were apprehended and interned (Rosenfeld 2014). However, unlike the mass internment of Japanese on the US mainland, the Japanese in Hawai'i who were interned were those judged to be security threats, such as religious, business, cultural, and organizational leaders, consular agents, language school officials, newspaper editors, and commercial fishermen. This was less than one percent of American civilians and resident aliens of Japanese ancestry who comprised over 30 percent of the total population of Hawai'i at the time (Allen 1950). Although some politicians pressed for mass incarceration in Hawai'i, "...the nation's highest military commanders successfully resisted the pressure, not because of any concern for the civil rights of the Hawaiian Japanese, but because Japanese labor was crucial to both the civilian and military economies in Hawaii" (Daniels 1994:48).
Dismantling Buddhism: World War II Internment of Buddhist Priests

Little wonder that the Shintō and Buddhist priests were among the first civilians of Japanese ancestry to be seized by FBI agents within hours, days, or shortly after the December 7 attack on Pearl Harbor and taken to the Sand Island detention camp and other temporary detention centers on the neighbor islands. From there most were shipped to internment camps on the US mainland, often being transferred from camp to camp. Williams (2003) notes that the number and whereabouts of the Buddhist priests were kept from each other for national security reasons. Many of the priests were incarcerated in camps for the duration of the war though some chose to return to Japan. the Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawai‘i’s (HHMH) records show that of its 51 interned priests, 10 chose to repatriate to Japan during the war in 1943 and another 10 did so at the end of the war in 1945 (Hawaii 1991).

Buddhist Priests in Honouliuli Camp

After the closing of Sand Island Camp, which originally housed quarantined immigrants, internees were sent to the Honouliuli Internment and POW Camp which operated from March 1943 through the end of the war. The Honouliuli internment site was a US Army camp typical of other internment camps run by the DOJ, US Army, or WRA. The wooden cabins for internees and canvas tents for prisoners of war were located in the isolated and inhospitable Honouliuli Gulch. The internees referred to the camp as “Jigoku Dani” (Hell Valley) because of the blazing temperatures, swarming insects, and forbidding environment (Burton and Farrell 2008; Rosenfeld 2012).

The Japanese Cultural Center of Hawaii’i (JCCH) data bank (Hayashi 2012) lists 114 Shintō and Buddhist priest internees, only seven of whom were incarcerated in the Honouliuli Camp for any length of time. It is not clear exactly how many priests were actually interned at Honouliuli, but in addition to the JCCH list of seven priest internees, other names of priests, priestesses, and a nun appear in National Archives and Records Administration (NARA II) files, Soga’s (2008) list of internees departing from Honouliuli to other US mainland camps, and Williams’s (2003) list of “The Fourteen Major ‘Assembly Centers’” (1942). The names of 11 religious men and women identified from these sources include: Shintō priests Yoshio Akizaki and his son, Takeo Akizaki; Konkokyo sect Shintō priestess Haruko Takahashi; Jōdo Shinshū Buddhist priests Hakuin Isobe, Ryozen Kuwaye, and Ryuten Kashiwa; Tenrikyo sect
Buddhist priest Ichiro Genishi; Buddhist nun Shinsho Hirai; Sōtō Zen Buddhist Bishop Zenkyo Komagata and priest Jisho Yamasaki; and Kegon sect Buddhist priestess Ryuto Tsuda.

Records show that the Reverends Yoshio Akizaki, Takeo Akizaki, Jisho Yamasaki (Williams 2003), Ichiro Genishi, Hakuin Isobe, and Ryuten Kashiwa (Soga 2008) were shipped to internment camps on the US mainland. It appears that Bishop Zenkyo Komagata, the Reverend Ryozen Kuwaye, Priestesses Ryuto Tsuda and Haruko Takahashi, and Buddhist nun Shinsho Hirai, unlike the mass of Hawai‘i’s Buddhist priests, were not transferred to internment camps on the US mainland. They remained interned in Honouliuli Camp. Unfortunately, little is written about the living conditions or activities of the religious internees during their internment at Honouliuli. Most of what is learned comes from the available transcripts of their interrogation hearings.

The Buddhist priests in Honouliuli Camp were housed in the civilian section, with the women separated from the men. They were closely guarded and most likely did not conduct religious services although they were permitted private altars within their own confines. At her rehearing in November 1943, to determine if she should continue to be interned, Haruko Takahashi is asked: “Now, at the Internment camp, have you and Mrs. Tsuda held any service over there?” She replies: “I have not prayed once since I have been interned and I don’t know if Mrs. Tsuda prays or not because she lives in a separate house from me” (Takahashi 1945). In May 1944, Ryuto Tsuda testifies at her rehearing that she gets up at 5:30 a.m. every morning, faces the Fuji shrine and prays for her members’ sons who were fighting in Italy (Tsuda 1945). Neither Takahashi nor Tsuda mentions conducting religious services in the Honouliuli Camp.

The sparse information on some of the priests retrieved thus far is gleaned from interrogation hearings of relatively recent unclassified US government records. It is likely that the religious leaders who remained at Honouliuli were arrested later than those who were sent to camps on the US mainland. For example, both Komagata and Tsuda were able to avoid the initial wave of internment of religious leaders. Komagata was arrested three years later (Komagata 2011) and Tsuda was arrested months later (Nakagawa 1945).

Komagata’s Sōtō Zen sect was targeted as dangerous because of its “nationalistic tendencies.” Komagata himself was implicated among other reasons for his 1940 visit to Japan and its war front in China where he served
as a visiting consolation priest for the Japanese military. His brother served as the resident priest of the family's Buddhist temple in Japan (Komagata 1945). When Komagata was interned he left a newly constructed temple on the edge of downtown Honolulu with a congregation of several hundred followers. In his absence, his wife oversaw the temple and conducted services. In Honouliuli Camp, Komagata volunteered to clean toilets, symbolic of cleansing his heart daily (Komagata 2011).

Tsuda was a colorful if not feisty priestess of the Kegon sect. She was divorced, used an alias, claimed to have healing powers, and was described by her ex-husband and other (unidentified) informants as religiously fanatic (Nakagawa 1945; Nishimura 2014). She ministered over a small temple of 40 to 50 loyal members in the McCully district of Honolulu that was later moved to a Pālolo Valley location by her disciple, Helen Shizuko Nakagawa. Although born in Hawai‘i, Tsuda was suspect because she was educated in Japan and traveled to visit family there. She was accused of praying for Japanese victory in the war but she denied this in her interrogation hearings. While interned, Tsuda admittedly defied camp rules by smuggling letters out through Helen Nakagawa and talking with Buddhist followers in the camp. Despite her absence, her temple members continued to meet, convinced of her healing powers. Although not an ordained priestess, Nakagawa ministered over them. She, too, was later interned (Nakagawa 1945; Tsuda 1945).

Komagata's and Tsuda's responses to being interned might be seen as polar opposites—the former, seemingly resigned and entering deeper into his Buddhist tradition by daily cleansing his heart and the latter, defiantly continuing to minister to her followers even from afar. Both, however, continued to swear allegiance to the United States as did the other Honouliuli religious internees, to no avail. Although from different sects, both clung to their Buddhist religion in internment and returned to their temple congregations upon release. Regardless of their personal or sectarian differences, what they and other Buddhist priests shared in common was their judgment without trial, a breach of justice and their civil rights.

Buddhist Priests in US Mainland Camps

The small group of Buddhist ministers who were detained at Honouliuli was but a fraction of the well over 100 other Shintō and Buddhist priests from Hawai‘i who were incarcerated in camps on the US mainland (see Table 3). From their respected positions in tight-knit immigrant communities the
Buddhist priests from Hawai‘i were thrust into camps in hostile and stifling environments more than an ocean away from all that was familiar. Not much is written about how these priest internees fared under conditions of unlawful imprisonment. Some information is discovered in personal diaries and stories passed on to family members and others but only in some cases are they translated and/or made available to the public. By recapturing some of the experiences of the Hawai‘i Buddhist priests in DOJ, US Army, or WRA camps, we gain some idea of the impact of internment not only on their lives.

Table 3
Number of Interned Buddhist and Shintō Priests from Hawai‘i in 1941, by Sect and Island

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sect</th>
<th>Island not known</th>
<th>Hawai‘i</th>
<th>Kaua‘i</th>
<th>Lāna‘i</th>
<th>Maui</th>
<th>Moloka‘i</th>
<th>O‘ahu</th>
<th>All</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jōdo Shinshū – Higashi</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>23</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>0</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>3</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total                  | 7                | 28      | 10     | 2      | 15   | 1       | 59    | 122 |

Sources: Hawai‘i Hongwanji Ministers’ Association (1991); Hayashi (2012); Box 228 (1945); Box 257 (1945); Box 293 (1945); Box 305 (1945); Box 2632 (1945); Soga (2008); and Williams (2003, n.d.-a, n.d.-b, n.d.-c).
but on the institution of the Buddhist religion. In addition, we see Buddhism’s influence on its followers’ response to the internment trauma and its effect on camp life.

One Hawai‘i Jōdo Shinshū Buddhist priest who was interned in several US mainland internment camps is the Reverend Ryoshin Okano. His thriving temple in Pearl City stood precariously close to Pearl Harbor and its nearby military bases. That alone posed a security threat and so he was arrested the night Pearl Harbor was bombed, spent about two months in the Sand Island camp, and was then interned in various camps on the US mainland (Okano 2014). Representative of other active priests ministering to the Japanese Buddhist communities in Hawai‘i at the outbreak of the war, Okano came from Japan an educated and ordained minister in the hopes of spreading the teachings of the Hongwanji or Jōdo Shinshū sect. His decision to live his life as a missionary in the Islands was affirmed when he traveled back to Japan and returned to Hawai‘i with his bride ready to start a family. When he was interned, he left his wife and two young children behind. In May 1943, they joined him in camp at Crystal City, Texas. Eventually the family repatriated to Japan via a year-and-a-half stay in Singapore and finally all reunited in Hawai‘i in 1951 (Okano 1945; Okano 2008). Okano’s son, retired Hongwanji Bishop Thomas Okano, recalls little of the internment experience. He remembers his father telling him that ministers were among the least useful in camp because they were not laborers or skilled in a trade but rather “only read scriptures” and so, many were assigned or volunteered to haul trash (Okano 2010).

In his memoirs, Soga (2008) expresses his personal opinion that on the whole, priests and educators behaved in the worst ways in the internment camps. He was disappointed to find that some Buddhist priests were greedy, others avoided work, and still others lacked character and humility. The priests themselves were somewhat critical of their own character flaws or any less than admirable behavior that surfaced during incarceration (Okano 2010; Tana 1976–89). However, for the most part, they stoically embraced Buddhist teachings such as perseverance, nonattachment, and acceptance that brought comfort and solace while enduring the severe physical, mental, and emotional hardships of internment (Fujimura 1985; Tamai 1981).

Most of the ministers were incarcerated in DOJ or US Army camps for enemy aliens. A few, however, were allowed to serve in WRA camps where the non-enemy internees were held. Many resumed their positions as spiritual
leaders in the desolate and inhospitable camps that confined them and their captive congregations. The role of the religious leadership included more than spiritual guidance especially because the Buddhist religion was the only major institution of the Japanese that was allowed to operate in the camps. More than half of the Japanese internees declared themselves Buddhist and it is this group of followers that the cadre of Buddhist priests dutifully served, officiating over memorial services, funerals, and weddings and organizing rituals and festivals acknowledging Buddha’s birthday, Obon (custom of honoring spirits of ancestors), and other annually celebrated traditional events. Hunter (1971) tells of Hawai‘i’s Rev. Hakuai Oda expertly fashioning cherry blossoms with beet juice–dyed toilet tissue that was used at a festival commemorating Buddha’s birth at Camp McCoy in Wisconsin. On this occasion, Hawai‘i’s Rev. Ninryo Nago addressed the festival goers and reminisced about the prewar celebrations of this same annual event that were held at Kapi‘olani Park in Waikiki, Hawai‘i.

“Buddhist life in the camps revolved around the barrack ‘churches’ (some were mess halls or recreation buildings) that held religious services and education, especially on Sundays” (Williams 2002:195). In this context the Buddhist priests not only provided spiritual support, they also maintained and transmitted Japanese cultural heritage to their followers. “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” (Williams 2003:267).

**Hardships in the Hawai‘i Buddhist Communities**

While the Buddhist congregations in the camps, led by their priests, observed the rituals and practices of their religion, the Buddhist temples in Hawai‘i, left abandoned of their priests, struggled in their absence. Many of the temples were closed, but in some cases, the wives of the interned temple priests assumed their duties in a limited capacity as martial law forbade large gatherings of Japanese people. Bishop Shugen Komagata (2011) recalls that his grandmother conducted services such as funerals and weddings when her husband was interned at Honouliuli. Bishop Yoshiaki Fujitani (2005), whose father Rev. Kodo Fujitani left a wife and eight children when he was interned, recalls that his mother conducted religious services. In 1948, Rev. Kodo Fujitani became the first elected Hongwanji bishop in postwar Hawai‘i, following acting Bishop Rev. Ryuten Kashiwa.
The hardships imposed upon the wives of abruptly interned temple priests were severe. Many did not speak English, were isolated from their temple communities, and forced to find work of some kind (Umehara 1993). Typical of other ministers’ wives, Shigeo Kikuchi, wife of Jōdo Shinshū Rev. Chikyoku Kikuchi, was left in fear and confusion after her husband was taken away without explanation from their rural temple in Nā'ālehu on the Big Island of Hawai‘i. Although she was told he would return in two or three days, it was three months before she was permitted to meet with him at Kilauea Military Camp before he was eventually interned on the US mainland. With no access to their frozen bank account, conditions were desperate. In despair, she burned possessions that were associated with Japan including many rare Japanese books, pictures, and diaries. However, she clung tenaciously to her Buddhist heritage (Kikuchi 1991).

Similarly, Yoshiko Tatsuguchi, herself an ordained Buddhist minister and wife of interned Rev. Goki Tatsuguchi, was left with six young children and the responsibilities of the Shinshū Kyōkai Mission on O‘ahu. With the help of temple members and friends she was able to endure the war-long adversity thrust upon her (Suzuki 2009).

The restrictions placed on the practice of the Buddhist religion and the loss of its priests in Hawai‘i had especially devastating effects on the Issei members. “Without the temples, where they had congregated for years to worship and socialize, and without their priests, whom they had relied on for moral and spiritual guidance, they were deprived of everything that gave meaning to their existence” (Hunter 1971:193). Suzuki (1957) mentions one especially devout Shin member from the coffee farms in Kona on the Big Island of Hawai‘i. He characterizes her as a myōkōnin (a wondrous devout follower of Shin Buddhism) because of her deeply spiritual songs and poems. In a letter to her interned minister, Chiyono Sasaki, who sent four sons to fight for the United States wrote, “After you left us (for the internment camp in 1942), our life was not hard materially but spiritually it was most terrible” (Wells 2012:176).

In order to alleviate the void left by their interned ministers, lay members of Buddhist temples petitioned the Office of the Military Governor for permission to conduct Buddhist services. However, it ruled that “The general policy of this office is to discourage the resumption of Japanese religious activities other than Christian” (Japanese Internment and Relocation Files 1982). The
fear of providing opportunity for subversive gatherings was stronger than any inclination to allow for the practice of a foreign religion.

**Buddhism and Priests in the Camps: Choices, Changes, and Challenges**

In Honouliuli and in camps scattered in remote inland areas across the United States, Buddhist priests persevered under conditions fraught with ambiguity, conflict, and contradiction. The question of loyalty, the internal sectarian differences, the pressure to “Americanize,” the generational (Issei–Nisei) shift in power, and other daunting issues of daily living posed challenges (Bloom 2010). We suggest that the rational choice model provides insight into the difficult decisions and choices made by the Buddhist leadership, priests, and lay internees as individuals and as a community. The choices they made under the constraints and opportunities at that time helped to revitalize Japanese Buddhism in Hawai‘i and the US mainland.

**The Question of Loyalty**

From the beginning of World War II and even before the bombing of Pearl Harbor the communications sent from the Buddhist headquarters in Kyōto, Japan and from the American-based Buddhist leadership to priests and followers on the national and local levels strongly urged loyalty to the United States (Tabrah 1989; Kumata 2007). The Kyōto-based Rev. Abbot Jikai Yamasato sent to each Hawai‘i Kyōdan minister a personal letter exhorting patriotic service to the United States. “Bishop Kuchiba received a telegram from the Abbott with the same unmistakable directive, Japanese ministers serving in the Hawaii Mission were to be one hundred per cent [sic] loyal to the United States in the conflict that, this fall of 1941, every headline indicated was imminent” (Tabrah 1989:78). Regardless of the pledge of loyalty and the absence of a single incident of sabotage or subversion, Buddhism was suspect and Buddhist priests were automatically judged dangerous enemy aliens.

While the official position of the North American Buddhist Mission (NABM) headquarters located in Camp Topaz, Utah during the war unequivocally called for loyalty and support of the United States, many of the Issei ministers were personally in sympathy with Japan and elated at news of its victories (Fujimura 1985; Tana 1976–89). Bishop Gikyo Kuchiba, a devout and serious scholar of the HHMH had difficulty accepting Japan’s final defeat and repatriated to Japan after the war leaving the Hongwanji temporarily without a leader. His earlier prewar messages to the July 1941 Buddhist assembly
of ministers and lay delegates in Hawai‘i publicly and dutifully championed patriotism and loyalty and in September 1941 at the Young Buddhist Association (YBA) annual conference, Bishop Kuchiba challenged, “...now is time for you young people to prove yourselves by being ready to die a martyr to your country of stars and stripes as an American citizen of Japanese ancestry under the Buddhist faith” (Tabrah 1989:78).

As spokespersons and leaders of their congregations, the Issei Buddhist priests pledged allegiance to the United States, the country that denied them citizenship, while also harboring loyal sentiments to their country of birth and citizenship. Such was their dilemma which Williams (2003) referred to as “complex loyalties” noting that “some of the very same priests who exhibited pro-Japanese tendencies also encouraged young Nisei to volunteer for the 100th Infantry 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” (p. 270).

Among the interned Hawai‘i Buddhist ministers, Rev. Ryuten Kashiiwa’s son, Genro Kashiiwa, served in the famed 100th Infantry Battalion/442nd Regimental Unit and Rev. Kodo Fujitani’s son, Yoshiaki Fujitani, (later to become reverend and bishop), served in the US Military Intelligence Service (MIS). While on active duty, Yoshiaki Fujitani recalls visiting his father in the DOJ SanTE Fe camp but remembers only the small talk and little else of the visit (Fujitani 2005). The Buddhist priests were wedged between a forced either-or question of loyalty when in fact they were likely neither or both, so conflicting were their loyalties. Officially, they stood by their decision to remain loyal to the United States.

The Differences among the Buddhist Sects in the Camps

The oppositions facing the ministers were not limited to those they had with their captors; they were internal among the different Buddhist sects as well. While more than the majority was of the Jôdo Shinshû sect, other Buddhist sects were living side by side. The sectarian differences causing tension and disputes among the groups were not only doctrinal, they were financial and political as well, including the distribution of offerings and the loyalty issue (Kashima 1977). However, the involuntary confinement in close and crowded living quarters in the barracks, the ritual and ceremonial needs of the internees, and other desperate conditions of internment compelled collaboration and mutual aid. In addition, “The WRA forced Buddhist sects to

cooperate with each other, which meant that doctrinal differences were often ignored in favor of a more common, trans-sectarian Buddhism” (Williams 2002:195). This was reflected in joint services, common chanting, rites, and other customary practices.

The compromises on the part of the different Buddhist sects helped to prevent conflict and maintain harmony in the camps. The general Buddhist doctrines of non-ego, interdependence of all beings, and nonattachment provided a perfectly suited philosophy for adapting to crisis in forced confinement. Buddhist teachings reinforced the benefits of tolerance and cooperation among the internees in enduring wartime adversity in the camps.

**The Pressure to “Americanize”**

While priests and internees struggled with divided loyalties; religious, ethnic, and cultural identification; and generational differences, the position of the WRA was unmistakable and deliberate—that of “Americanizing” the Japanese. The WRA’s program advocated speaking English not Japanese, playing sports like baseball and basketball rather than sumō or jūdō, joining American organizations like Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts rather than young Buddhist clubs, converting to Christianity rather than practicing Buddhism, and supporting the war cause by buying war bonds, donating blood to the American Red Cross, joining the US Armed Forces, and other displays of loyalty (Williams 2003). The efforts were not in vain, perhaps more so because the Americanization process had already taken root among the Nisei even prior to the war. Embracing the lifestyle and traditions of the United States was less a problem and more an advantage for the Nisei who were US citizens by birth.

However, in an unintended way, the barracks way of life, especially the practice of Buddhism with its traditional celebrations and ceremonies, strengthened identification with Japanese heritage and culture. Services and social gatherings enhanced ethnic solidarity and maintained cultural beliefs and practices despite the pressure to Americanize. The Buddhist religion functioned simultaneously as a means of affirming Japanese heritage and demonstrating cultural and moral resistance to compulsory Americanization (Okihiro 1984; Williams 2003).

**The Generational Shift in Power from the Issei to the Nisei**

In the internment camps, the Issei Buddhist ministers were relied upon heavily for ritual and moral support and thus they were respected as leaders.
by their congregations. However, their authority was undermined by WRA policies that demanded dealing with and working through English-speaking Japanese American Nisei in the camps. This transition of power broke with tradition and religious values and beliefs such as filial piety and ancestral worship and threatened to add to the differences dividing the Issei and Nisei. In light of the mass internment divesting the Issei Buddhist ministers of their influence, and to protect the Nisei and their children whose homeland by birth was the United States, the national Buddhist leadership began to answer to the Americanization policies and program in self-preserving ways. The decisions and adaptations they made helped to ensure the future generations of Buddhists a rightful place in the United States.

The process of adapting to the American way of life was not something new. The war amplified and accelerated the changes set in motion earlier. After a series of meetings in April 1944 in the Topaz Camp, Utah, the NABM with Bishop Matsukage at its head was renamed the Buddhist Churches of America (BCA) (Kashima 1977), confirming changes that were brewing years before the war. In July 1944, at a YBA meeting held in Salt Lake City with predominantly Nisei in attendance, the new organizational changes under the name of the BCA were ratified. In his will to all his ministers, Bishop Matsukage acknowledged that "[w]ith the war as the turning point, the Japanese-American society has changed from the Issei to the Nisei era. Accordingly, the Buddhist Churches must, of necessity, also undergo a change" (Sanada 2007:113). The wisdom of investing the Nisei with power over religious matters proved beneficial for the survival and propagation of Buddhism in the United States.

Although the Nisei were thrust into leadership roles by structural institutional changes in the Buddhist church and the policies of the WRA, their assumption into power was not immediate. Bishop Matsukage and Issei Buddhist priests retained their roles as architects and advisers of the newly configured BCA. Furthermore, Okihiro (1984) contends that rather than widening the generational breach between the Issei and Nisei, the forced internment further exposed the historical anti-Japanese prejudice and discrimination that prevented full communion with the American society, thus drawing the Nisei to their roots from which they were drifting away.

**Making the Best of Daily Living in the Camps**

The daily drudgery, boredom, and restrictions of camp life imposed burdens on the lives of interned ministers and laypersons and at the same
time provided opportunities unavailable to those outside the camps. On a personal level, many of the ministers who were formerly serving in isolated rural communities, shouldering the cares and concerns of their congregations, found camaraderie in adversity and time to study and reflect upon the nature of life, Buddhist teachings, and their fate. Williams (2003) observes that “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” (p. 267).

In Hawai‘i where martial law prevailed, most temples were closed; Japanese language schools were shut down and Japanese organizations, clubs, and social groups were disbanded. American civilians and resident aliens of Japanese ancestry were denied assembly in large groups thus prohibiting religious, educational, and social gatherings of any sort. Meanwhile, in the camps, the Buddhist church was involved with or organized Japanese language classes, study groups, cultural clubs and activities, and religious services that maintained Japanese ethnic heritage. These groups and activities helped to make the best of the dire circumstances of internment.

The Revival of Buddhism in Post–World War II Hawai‘i

World War II came to an official end on September 1, 1945, when Japan formally surrendered on the USS Missouri in Tokyo Bay. Two months later in November 1945, the first Buddhist priests returning to Hawai‘i entered Honolulu Harbor aboard an army transport, with others soon to follow (Hunter 1971). The postwar era gave birth to long incubating changes prefiguring the Americanization of Buddhism, thus defining its future in Hawai‘i and the US mainland. The BCA and HHMH had already agreed to significant changes that included severing ties with Japan, minimizing relations with the Jodo Shinshu Kyoto headquarters, electing its own bishop, and relinquishing control to the Nisei (Kashima 1977; Tabrah 1989).

The direction of these changes was not foreign to the Hawai‘i Jodo Shinshu Buddhists. As early as the turn of the twentieth century, Bishop Yemyo Imamura of the HHMH, a highly respected religious and civic leader whose tenure as bishop was from 1899 to his death in 1932, had charted a course that was meant to hasten the Americanization of the Japanese immigrants as well as to universally spread the teachings of the Buddha. Undaunted by the racial and religious bigotry of the period, “He organized Boys Scout troops and worked to universalize Buddhism through the development of hymns,
sermons in English, Sunday school programs, and used pews and pulpits in temples” (Bloom 1998:33). In August 1924, in a landmark ceremony in Honolulu at the Honpa Hongwanji, Bishop Imamura invested ordination rites upon Ernest and Dorothy Hunt. An Englishman by birth and Buddhist by choice, Hunt advanced the program of Americanizing and universalizing Buddhism. Through the war years and beyond he remained a spokesperson, defender, and most influential figure in the Buddhist community in Hawai‘i. Buddhist leaders like Imamura and Hunt played pivotal roles in the evolution of Buddhism in the Hawaiian Islands, the portal through which Buddhism passed on its journey to the US mainland. The unprecedented developments and events in the early history of Buddhism in Hawai‘i were visible precursors of changes that were to come and the war waged in the Pacific and European theaters hastened the arrival.

On the US mainland the Buddhist church was at the forefront in the resettlement of thousands of internees after the camps were closed (Horinouchi 1973). Although many of the temples had been vandalized or destroyed during the war years those that remained were used as hostels in transitioning the internees back into mainstream society. While those who still owned agricultural land or property returned to their home sites, many others relocated to different areas of the country to begin life anew. Despite the uncertainties and challenges of resettlement, post–World War II America was fertile ground for the spread of Buddhism. Davis (1993) claims that the internment experience forced the spread of Buddhism eastward into new territories, new temples, and new congregations.

In Hawai‘i the Buddhist priests returned to temple communities that had been left largely adrift. A few of the temples were vandalized but others were ready to welcome back their priests. The trend toward Americanization and changes in the Buddhist church were already in motion. A series of interviews with religious and academic knowledgeable sources of Buddhism in general and in Hawai‘i confirmed the institutional changes that were heralded decades before and thrust into action by the war (Bloom 2010; Okano 2010; Komagata 2011; Williams 2011; Yosemori 2011). In post–World War II Hawai‘i, included among the many changes were: the local Buddhist church elected its own Bishop; English fluency was the standard; making decisions and setting policies were in the control of lay leaders; and Nisei were encouraged to be priests. The changes were neither immediate nor necessarily easy but they were imminent.
Returning Nisei veterans were among the leaders of a vibrant YBA in post–World War II Hawai‘i that worked together with a formerly interned Buddhist priest, the Reverend Newton Ishiura, a Hawai‘i-born Nisei from California, to bring attention to and recognition of the religious identity of Nisei soldiers who fought in the war against Japan. In 1948, the Hawai‘i YBA erected and dedicated a memorial plaque on the HHMH temple grounds inscribed with the names of 374 American Buddhists who lost their lives in the war. That same year, the YBAs nationwide sent a petition with 100,000 signatures to James Forrestal, secretary of defense, requesting that the letter “B” for Buddhist be included among the Protestant “P”, Catholic “C”, and Hebrew “H” religious identification tags. Eventually in 1950, Buddhist soldiers fighting in the Korean conflict were allowed to wear temporary plastic tags with the letter “B” provided by the Hawai‘i YBA, along with the regulation metal identification tags. With the success of the “B” for Buddhist campaign, Buddhism was finally accepted as a part of the US government’s religious identification system. Shortly after, the US War Department approved the dharmacakra (Buddhist wheel of life symbolizing the Noble Eightfold Path) as an appropriate grave marker for Buddhist veterans of World War II and future Buddhist veterans. Amid the symbolic eight Bodhi trees planted in 1949 at the request of the Hawai‘i YBA, Nisei Buddhist veterans were identified with appropriate grave markers finally granting them a fitting resting place in the National Cemetery of the Pacific (Punchbowl Cemetery) (Hunter 1971; Tabrah 1971; Masatsugu 2004).

In the ensuing years, the Hawai‘i Buddhist community extended its educational reach by establishing the first regularly accredited private Buddhist elementary school in the United States in 1949, a Buddhist Study Center modeled after the Institute of Buddhist Studies at Berkeley in 1972 (Tabrah 1989), and the first Buddhist high school in the United States in 2003 (Essoyan 2003). The Americanization of Shin Buddhism in Hawai‘i, initiated by Bishop Yemyo Imamura in the early twentieth century, was most evident in Sunday English services in temples with pews and English gatha (hymn) books. From policy to practice the Buddhist church experienced change and revival.

Conclusion

What is the significance of Honouliuli to Buddhism, its priests and congregations, and to its future? Honouliuli Internment and POW Camp’s importance to the attacks on the First Amendment rights to freedom of speech, press, religion, peaceful assembly, and petitioning the government for
the redress of grievance is monumental. Although many people still do not know that an internment camp ever existed on the island of O‘ahu, Hawai‘i, as the remnants of the physical site and the story of internees are uncovered, there is a growing awareness of and knowledge about the injustices of war. For those resident aliens and American citizens of Japanese ancestry who suffered through the internment debacle of World War II, whether at Honouliuli or another DOJ, US Army, or WRA camp, it has seemingly come full circle. The denial of their civil rights was recognized by the US government through redress. Still, 70-plus years after the bombing of Pearl Harbor and the events that followed, the painful memories of war linger. Understandably, many remaining internees, as well as their family members, choose not to speak about the experience. However, the silence that shields the injustices of war and its collateral destruction must be broken if only to document and preserve historical realities that threaten democracy. Honouliuli is stark evidence of the threats to democracy that accompany threats to national security.

Our research on Buddhism and the internment and the aftermath of World War II followed from an interest in the history of Buddhism in Hawai‘i from the early days of immigration to the present, with questions about its future. It is likely that no other single event more greatly challenged its existence, authority, or viability. Japanese Buddhism survived the internment experience of World War II and adapted to the many changes moving from a pre-modern plantation economy to a modern service economy. In attempting to move beyond simply describing to explaining the decisions, adaptations, changes, constraints, and opportunities that were faced in the process, we propose that the new paradigm’s rational choice theory is useful as a unifying conceptual framework. It assumes that after considering costs and benefits, individuals, groups, and communities choose options that maximize their benefits.

In this paper, rational choice theory is used to help explain individual choices such as members deciding to remain Buddhist or convert to Christianity, priests choosing to stay in the United States or repatriate to Japan, as well as institutional decisions made by the leadership and governing bodies of the BCA, HHMH, and YBA to pledge loyalty to the United States, revamp archaic organizational structures, and “Americanize” religious policies and practices. Whether choices were made freely or under duress simply points to the constraints and opportunities that are considered in rational choice theory. Further, although the old paradigm appears to better fit Buddhism in the early plantation economy assuming that immigrants follow tradition
and take on ascribed religious identities, beliefs, and practices, it leaves little to the discretion of the individual. Smith and Froese (2008) suggest that the new paradigm is not confined to capitalist industrial and post-industrial settings but to pre-industrial societies as well and that there are religious options to what appears to be a monopoly. Further, while critics charge that among other concerns rational choice theory is too simple a model of reality, bordering on tautology and explaining the obvious, proponents counter that these same criticisms can be made of alternative theories and the fact is that it does fit the data (Iannaccone 1995).

World War II internment did not abolish Japanese Buddhism. It did accelerate adaptations and accommodations already in process that foreshadowed the “Americanization” of Buddhism. Looking to the future of Buddhism in Hawai‘i and the US mainland, it is likely that it will survive and even thrive if Buddhist actors make religious choices that maximize their benefits as rational choice theory predicts.

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