

## **Asian American (AA) Buddhist Identity Talk: Natural criticism of Buddhism in the U.S.**

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At a growth rate of 170 percent since 2000 (Willis, 2012), Buddhism is now one of the fastest-growing religions in the United States (Willis, 2012). Despite comprising more than two-thirds of Americans who identify as Buddhists (Han, 2017), Asian American Buddhists are underrepresented—and often misrepresented—in scholarly sources. Using Cultural Discourse Analysis (Carbaugh, 2007) as my main theoretical framework, I unveil deep-seated meanings of action, relations and being (Carbaugh, 2007) as found in Asian American (AA) Buddhist discourse surrounding their ethnic and religious identity.

I interviewed twenty adults who identified as Asian American Buddhists between the ages of 25-60. Interviews were conducted either in person or through FaceTime, and were audio-recorded. I transcribed the audio data, and using participants' own words, I created cultural propositions (Carbaugh, 2007), from which I then extracted cultural premises (Carbaugh, 2007) of what exists and what is valued in this speech community (Milburn, 2009).

Preliminary findings include their reluctance to use the identity term "Buddhist" in their daily social lives given its association with a minority religion and a sense of "foreignness," which to participants further compound their stereotype as "perpetual foreigners" (Ebers-Martinez, Dorajj, 2009), whom are not fully American, regardless how many generations have been born and raised in U.S. soil. They also questioned their perceived role as a bridge between the "two Buddhisms" (Seagar, 2012): older immigrants who brought the religion to the U.S. and recent converts who mostly consist of Caucasian Americans.

The main goal of this study of mine is to shed light on a group which has been underrepresented in contemporary studies of Buddhism in the U.S. In giving voice to AA Buddhists, I also aim to move beyond the immigrant/convert, modern/traditional, and ethnic/white identity categories to accurately represent the diversity of peoples and communities that make-up who we currently identify as American Buddhists.

## Reference

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