

THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY
SCHREYER HONORS COLLEGE

DEPARTMENT OF ARTS AND HUMANITIES

A COMPARISON OF BUDDHIST HEALING PRACTICES IN PHILADELPHIA WITH
RELEVANT SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

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FALL 2016

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements
for a baccalaureate degree in Letters, Arts, and Sciences
with honors in Letters, Arts, and Sciences

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ABSTRACT

The role of Buddhism in the U.S. and the activities that are practiced in some specific Buddhist centers and temples around the country have been studied by many Western scholars, but few researchers have studied Buddhist healing techniques. This paper will present the ethnographic study that I conducted with the ACURA (Abington College Undergraduate Research Activities) research team in the Greater Philadelphia area to explore and examine a variety of healing methods offered in Buddhist temples and Buddhist meditation centers. It will describe the healing techniques carried out by monks, leaders, and temple-goers, as well as demonstrate the perceived effects of these methods on one's well-being, as described by Buddhists and non-Buddhist participants. Lastly, it will present the scientific research on these and similar techniques, exploring whether Buddhist beliefs are supported by science, and identifying Buddhist healing techniques that have not yet been scientifically studied.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people I would like to thank for their role in the development of this thesis, foremost being my adviser, Dr. Pierce Salguero, for his unwavering support and critical feedback that allowed me to grow both as a student and as a researcher. This process has been long and challenging, and without his encouragement, patience, and enthusiasm, it is difficult for me to imagine how I could have put this thesis together. For all of this, I am eternally grateful.

A very special thanks to the members of the ACURA team: Ryan Rose, Ashley Cole, Duyen Hy, Meihang Lim, Vinh Pham, Qiao Zhen Yeung, Christina Chen, and Diana Tang. Every result presented in this thesis was accomplished with the help and support of this amazingly diverse team. Thank you all for this wonderful collaboration.

I would also like to recognize the brilliant comments and suggestions that came from my second reader, Dr. Michael Bernstein, whose support cannot go unappreciated. His detailed reviews were essential during the preparation of this thesis.

Finally, I would like to thank my family. Words cannot properly convey how grateful I am for their love and support. To my mother and father, I am thankful for all the sacrifices they have made for me. Thank you for your unparalleled love, selfless encouragement, and allowing me to explore new directions in life. Above all else, thank you for always believing in me. I am truly lucky to have such wonderful parents. Thank you, mom and dad!

Literature Review

Buddhism is a religion and a philosophy that was founded by Gautama Buddha over 2500 years ago in India. Legend says that at the age of forty-five, Gautama attained enlightenment, a state of perfect wisdom and great compassion (Skorupski, p.139). He devoted the rest of his life to teaching others about suffering and ways to relieve suffering that laid the foundations for Buddhism. In Sanskrit, an old Indo-Aryan language, the term for suffering is *dukkha*, which signifies discomfort of mind or body including every mental or physical pain a human being can undergo. Buddhist teachings and practices, known as the *Dharma*, are traced to the Buddha, who is said to have discovered and revealed myriad ways to cure the suffering of humankind (Kitagawa, 1989, p.10). Although Buddhism did not develop its own medical tradition, it presented its devotees with ways they could maintain good physical health so as to strive for spiritual health.

Buddhists have developed medical, doctrinal, and magical approaches to healing that represent a uniquely Buddhist understanding of sickness or injuries (Kitagawa, 1989, p.13). However, in reality, there are many regional differences. Buddhist communities in India and Southeast Asia depend mostly on *Āyurveda*, a traditional form of Indian medicine based on using herbs to treat disease (Kitagawa, 1989, p.13). Buddhists in East Asia, on the other hand, examine and treat disease based on a combination of Indian concepts and criteria from Chinese medicine (Salguero, 2014). On one level, Buddhists who follow *Āyurveda* to diagnose and treat illnesses accept the notion that disease is caused by the imbalance of the three basic humors in

the body: *vāta* (wind), *pitta* (bile), and *kapha* (phlegm). On another level, Buddhist perspective on disease cannot be separated from the doctrine of *karma* which refers to the correlation of one's action and its subsequent consequences. In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, Buddhism became an important factor in healthcare globally, leading to an increase of interest among Western scholars to further research this field (Salguero, 2015, p 48). Buddhist texts have provided scholars and devotees with information about healing, illnesses, and physicians. Scholars and Buddhist enthusiasts often refer to this medical knowledge as “Buddhist medicine.”

During the first millennium CE, Buddhism spread from India to other parts of Eurasia contributing to a cross-cultural exchange of medical ideas that laid the foundations for health systems in countries or regions such as Tibet, Nepal, and Thailand (Salguero, 2015). Tibetan medicine is a healing system very similar to Ayurvedic medicine. The healing practices performed in Tibet and Nepal by lamas, priests, and shamans include tantric rituals, mudras, meditation and mantras (Dietrich, 1996, p. 473). On the other hand, the Thai cultural understanding of health and approach to healthcare has been shaped by the law of karma (Ratanakul, 1999). Hence, many Thai healers advise their patients to practice righteousness by being more compassionate, accepting, and forgiving toward themselves and others.

Buddhism was introduced in the West around 1844 through the work of Edward Salisbury, who examined the Buddhist system, and Elizabeth Palmer Peabody's translation of the *Lotus Sūtra*, a very well-known Buddhist scripture (Wilson, 2014, p. 15). From 1844 until the 20th century there was an increased interest among Westerners to explore Buddhist beliefs, ethics, and history. Although there were Chinese and Japanese Buddhist populations living in the U.S. since the 19th century, it is not until the 1960s that a significant number of Asian immigrants from other Asian countries arrived in the U.S. (Numrich, 2005, p. 345).

Previous scholars have theorized that Buddhists in the United States can be divided into two main groups: the Asian “ethnic Buddhists” and the non-Asian “converts.” While the model has been critiqued by subsequent scholars as overly simplistic or implicitly racist (Hickey, 2010), nevertheless, Paul Numrich has shown in general these two main groups’ approaches to Buddhism have had different influences on its development in the U.S. (Numrich, 2005, p. 345). According to Numrich, ethnic Buddhists practice Buddhism by taking part in cultural activities that preserve their ethnic identity, while converts to Buddhism are mainly interested in Buddhist philosophy and the practice of meditation. The two groups also represent two different views about the role of Buddhism in complementary and alternative medicine (CAM).

CAM includes a range of healing practices that fall beyond the scope of the scientific model of health care. Although most Americans rely on modern medicine, interest in CAM among both American patients and health care providers has increased considerably. CAM practices among U.S. Buddhists include folk medicine and healing practices such as herbal remedies and spiritual rituals (Numrich, 2005). According to Numrich, Asian folk medicine in the U.S. is mainly practiced in ethnic Buddhist circles, such as Japanese, Korean, Tibetan, Vietnamese, Thai, and Chinese communities. For instance, in many Thai temples, the practice of herbalism has become possible due to outdoor and indoor planting. The dried herbs derived from these plants are prescribed as herbal remedies by resident “healer-monks.” Along with herbal remedies, the monk may also prescribe certain rituals to the ill person so that he or she can accumulate merit and balance his karma.

The practice of accumulating merit is relevant in Buddhist communities in the U.S. that believe that karma may be the cause of fatal disease (Wu, 2002). Hongyu Wu has investigated a Chinese Buddhist community which is part of the Greater Boston Buddhist Cultural Center,

where techniques that reduce bad karma are often practiced. These kinds of meritorious practices include undertaking the Five Precepts (no killing, no stealing, no sexual misconduct, no lying, no intoxication), practicing vegetarianism, performing or attending religious rituals, as well as practicing meditation. According to Wu, this Chinese community is influenced by Humanistic Buddhism, a modern Chinese movement that places an emphasis on integrating Buddhist practices into everyday life and engaging in the world to help others. The attendees of this center have developed a very positive attitude toward life which they believe is helping them maintain their mental and physical well-being as well as balance their karma.

Numrich argues that, though many ethnic Buddhist temples and centers practice folk healing, often convert Buddhists are unaware of these practices because they are mainly drawn to meditation (Numrich, 2005, p. 349). Meditation is a Buddhist practice where the practitioner trains the mind, which in turn may have positive effects on his or her mental and physical health. By practicing meditation, one brings attention inwards, thus cultivating awareness of one's thoughts and actions. One of the most popular forms of meditation in contemporary American derives from the Buddhist practice of *sati*, meaning "memory," which is usually translated into English as "mindfulness" (Wilson, 2014, p 15). Looking back at the development of Buddhism in Asia, we see that mindfulness meditation has most often been practiced by Buddhist monks, combined with other practices with the goal to reach *nirvana* (Wilson 2014, p. 19), a state of enlightenment where suffering ceases. However, in certain cases, meditation was used to cure disease in pre-modern Buddhism (Salguero, 2012).

Nowadays, the practice of mindfulness meditation in the U.S. falls into the category of the body-mind approaches to CAM (Numrich, 2005, p. 345). Mindfulness meditation in the U.S. began to gain popularity in the 1970s due to the arrival of Buddhist teachers and monks to the

U.S., where they offered workshops and retreats on Buddhism and Buddhist practices for Westerners (Wilson, 2014, p. 31). Additionally, in 1979, John Kabat-Zinn, a doctor and scientist, launched the first Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center. These new mindfulness practices, a product of American Buddhism, quickly began to penetrate the mainstream. Although these practices have their roots in Buddhism, they are considered by their principal proponents to be secular. According to Joseph Cheah, convert Buddhists are much more interested in mindfulness than with any other aspect of Buddhism (Cheah, 2011). Cheah also argues that due to lack of interest, the diversity of Buddhist traditions is not equally valued among convert Buddhists and ethnic Buddhists (Cheah, 2011).

While the above literature review is only partial, it gives the overall shape of the current debates among scholars over contemporary American Buddhism. Scholars have been keen to compare ethnic versus convert Buddhists, and have addressed their approaches to healing in a limited way, but have failed to give a detailed picture of how Buddhist healing takes place within Buddhist institutions more broadly in the U.S. While Numrich and Wu have each explored a small subsection of the overall Buddhism population, this project seeks to catalog all of the diverse Buddhist approaches to healing in a single American city. It seeks to put to the test of ethnographic observation the models and arguments forwarded by Numrich, Wu, and Cheah.

Methodology of the Ethnographic Study

The ethnographic data presented in this paper is part of a larger research project conducted by my professor and honors thesis adviser, Dr. Pierce Salguero, at Pennsylvania State University which is called “Beyond Mindfulness: Varieties of Buddhist Healing in Multiethnic Philadelphia.”¹ My investigation of culture, religion, and healing practices in Buddhist institutions in Philadelphia was carried out through the ACURA (Abington College Undergraduate Research Activities) research team that I led during the 2015-2016 academic year. The ACURA team consisted of two research assistants and six other Penn State students that are fluent speakers of Asian languages including Vietnamese, Chinese, Korean, and Cambodian.

Through fieldwork conducted among members, teachers, and leaders of Buddhist temples and meditation centers located in Philadelphia and the surrounding counties (Bucks County, Berks County, Lehigh County, and Montgomery County), this project catalogues Buddhist practices that are considered by the interviewees as helping to achieve and maintain good physical, mental, and spiritual health. By going beyond mindfulness meditation centers and exploring a variety of Buddhist institutions, this study uncovered a richer description of Buddhist values, beliefs, teachings, and practices in this area. Furthermore, it allowed us to explore how a wide range of practitioners and teachers view health, interpret and treat disease within their own cultures and within specific Buddhist groups.

¹ <http://www.jivaka.net/philadelphia/>, last accessed 24 Sept. 2016.

To initiate the project, we identified over 40 institutions in the Greater Philadelphia area that included both Buddhist temples and non-denominational meditation centers. The majority of members in most of the temples are Asian immigrants that speak little English or no English at all. The non-denominational category includes centers mainly attended by Caucasians, although African Americans, Latinos, and Asian American convert Buddhists are also represented.

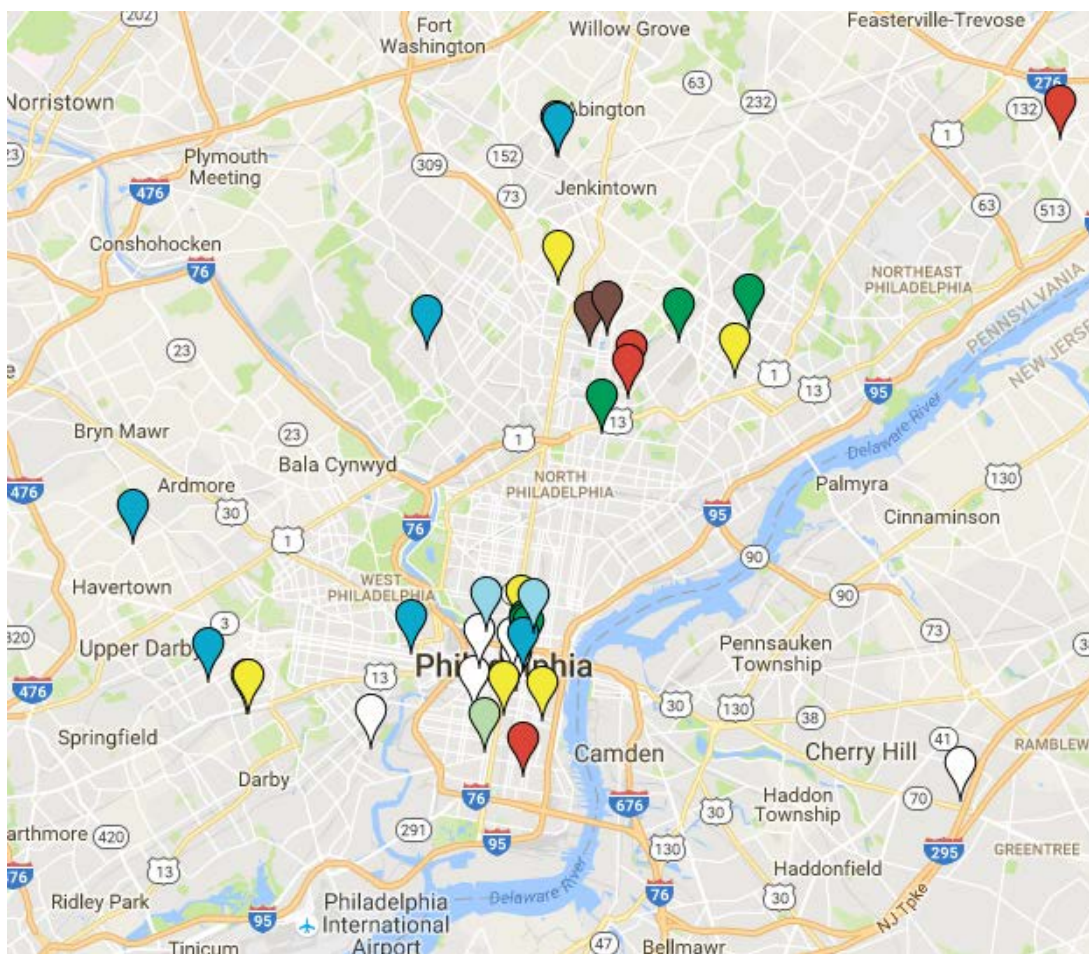


Figure 1. The map of Buddhist institutions in Philadelphia demonstrating color-coded locations depending on the cultural linguistic groups that they represent (Source: <http://www.jivaka.net/philadelphia/>, last accessed 14 Nov. 2016)

During the first phase of data collection, we closely observed the members, the teachers, and the activities that were taking place during the gatherings. During the site visits, we attended ceremonies and rituals that were taking place in each location. Every ceremony was open to the public, which made it easier to study and evaluate the way each group performed their rituals and engaged with the community. Almost every group had their own specific therapies or practices that could be performed to treat illnesses. Through these observations, we were able to collect information about the demographics of the population at each location, along with healing approaches that they used and suggested to others whenever illness was present. In a few cases, we recorded videos of ceremonies during which Buddhist monks and leaders performed rituals that they believe to have healing properties. These videos show the purpose of each ritual, the tools that the monks use during ceremonies, and how each practice is performed.

Although general information was gathered through observation, it did not always reveal the whole picture. Some of the places we visited conducted different healing ceremonies and holistic activities based on their schedules or the participant's needs. Activities differed especially between the cultural and the non-denominational groups. To gain a better understanding of each groups' values, beliefs, and practices, we furthered the research by conducting interviews with practitioners as well as leaders and teachers who guide the practitioners during the meetings. We were interested in exploring the participants' viewpoints on health and well-being, and the ways they relate Buddhist healing methods with the treatment and prevention of an array of illnesses. Some of questions that we asked the interviewees include:

What kind of Buddhist activities do you practice and how often? Can Buddhist practices improve your physical and mental health? How do Buddhist practices improve your physical and mental

health? Are there specific practices that help with particular problems? Through such questions, we learned more about the practitioners' personal experiences and their own thoughts on the connection between Buddhism and healing, and acquired a large amount of information on the Buddhist healing practices offered at each center.

Our research project resulted in the collection of 20 hours of recorded interviews. After analyzing and examining the data we were able to look at the bigger picture of Buddhist healing in the Philadelphia area as well as draw out similarities and differences between the different types of institutions. This information not only reveals modern continuities with traditional ancient Buddhist practices, but also provides insight into the way Buddhism has evolved and become a way of healthy living for many in the modern society.

Summary of Findings from the Ethnographic Research

In this section, I will be presenting and describing the healing methods that we discovered when studying these temples and meditation groups. Each practice will first be described very broadly based on the way that Buddhism generally teaches it before introducing the ways it is specifically being practiced in each location in Philadelphia. I have integrated statements by leaders and practitioners from particular temples or centers as to why they believe that these healing techniques are helpful in preventing and curing diseases

For general information such as name, address, telephone number, demographics, and a summary of healing practices of each Buddhist institution included in this section, refer to the Appendix.

Meditation

The word *meditation* is a translation of the term *dhyāna* from Indian Buddhism, which means “trance state” (Buswell, 2004, p. 520). Buddhist theories claim that the purpose of meditation is to achieve a state of calmness (*śamatha*) while cultivating concentration (*samādhi*). During the practice, the meditator’s awareness develops, allowing him or her to gather wisdom and serenity, clear his or her mind, and be able to distinguish the real from the unreal. During meditation, one becomes vigilant of one’s own behavior and thoughts, one continues to bring to mind the object of meditation, and continually directs the attention toward that object. This process of mindful recollection includes different mental states that are essential in cultivating

pure awareness. In the Buddhist tradition, it is believed that the meditator gains exceptional levels of knowing in which he or she becomes aware of reality and liberates him or herself from any suffering. The meditator's bodily posture is often the Buddha's lotus position, but meditators practice walking meditation, or other postures.

Some of the Buddhist places in Philadelphia in which devotees practice different types of meditation include the Mindfulness Institute, Chenrezig Tibetan Buddhist Center, Chua Giac Lam, Rulai Si, Won Buddhist Temple, and Soji Zen Center. The Mindfulness Institute at the Thomas Jefferson University offers a Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program that is modeled after the first MBSR program developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn. The program combines a number of mindful Eastern practices that have been shown to be effective in treating a variety of chronic disorders and diseases. These activities include meditation, yoga, and qigong that incorporates slow movements in harmony with breathing. According to the leaders at the Mindfulness Institute, their 8-week intensive training program in mindfulness is very beneficial for participants who are cultivating greater awareness of their mind and body, and who would like to learn better ways of reducing stress, handling anger and other strong emotions, as well as enhance their well-being.

Mindfulness meditation is one of the main activities practiced during the MBSR program. This practice is carried out by sitting down with eyes closed or half open, in a cross-legged position, with the back straight. The practitioner focuses his or her attention on a focal point of his or her choice, and continues breathing in and out for a number of minutes depending on the level of the practice. Most of the practitioners attending the MBSR program are patients that are encouraged by their therapist or physician to practice mindfulness. Patients take the MBSR classes to prevent physical or mental ailments, as well as to be treated for severe depression,

anxiety, fatigue, or insomnia. Additionally, cancer patients or patients who suffer from chronic pain take the MBSR classes to reduce their pain. According to the MBSR leaders, these patients claim to be able to better handle their life as well as cope with pain.

At the Chenrezig Tibetan Buddhist Center, on the other hand, attendees practice guided visualization meditation, specifically the Green Tara meditation. Green Tara is a Buddhist deity whose color symbolizes strength and activity. Her image is placed in the center of the altar in the devotional space where the meditation takes place. She is often depicted in art sitting on an open lotus flower with her legs extended ready to spring into action, and surrounded by gold ornaments. It is believed that by visualizing the Green Tara during this practice, she will help devotees clear obstacles, remove fear, and relieve their physical, emotional, and spiritual suffering.



Figure 2. The symbol of tām in Sanskrit, which represents the essence of Green Tara in Tibetan Buddhism (Green Tara Meditation, n.d.)

An important aspect of this meditation is the visualization of the symbol of Tam (*tām*), which is the “seed syllable” of Tara represented by a Tibetan letter. This symbol can be visualized at Tara’s heart or above the meditator’s head. During the practice, practitioners are guided to visualize Tam, along with all of the chakras of the meditators’ body aligned in sequence along the spine, neck, and skull. After the symbol of Tam and the chakras are aligned, practitioners visualize white light flowing through all of them. Devotees believe that through this visualization meditation they are bringing love, compassion, and kindness together, all of which symbolize Tara’s universal manifestation of compassion. Although during our gathering the leader offered insight mainly into the importance of this practice for spiritual growth, he also explained the benefits of meditation by associating the practitioner’s posture during meditation with a calmer nervous system and an improved musculoskeletal system.

At Chua Giac Lam temple, temple-goers who practice meditation are instructed on how to effectively perform a type of meditative technique called *jhāna*. They are instructed to focus on the breath and to try to slow it down as much as they can in order to go in a state of deep relaxation. Practitioners believe that through this technique they can go beyond stress-reduction properties to better focus on cultivating wisdom. This particular approach to meditation includes four levels of *jhāna*, each one deeper than the one preceding it. According to the representative of the temple, the first level of *jhāna* is reached when the practitioner stops striving and his senses drop away, the second level is achieved when the practitioner feels content physically and mentally, the third level is reached when the practitioner’s mind has become much calmer and he is enjoying this mindful state, and lastly, the fourth level is reached when the mind is totally stable and still. Chua Giac Lam devotees believe that when a person is suffering due to an illness or any other trouble, he or she can go beyond it by practicing *jhāna* meditation. They claim that

healing can come when the ill person can transcend the troublesome situation and not suffer from it.

At Rulai Si temple, the practice of meditation is focused on activating the *dantian*, which is an energy center located below the navel that is used as a focal point during the breathing exercise. In this particular type of meditation, the practitioner follows his breath very deeply into the body, as the breath comes in through the nose and reaches down to the *dantian*, and then comes back up from the *dantian* and out of the nose. By repeatedly practicing this type of meditation, one calms his mind as well as the *qi*, also known as a life force that circulates within each thing or being in Chinese philosophy (Pregadio, 2008). This type of energy is believed to circulate through different pathways in the body, which are also known as “meridians” in English. Rulai’s devotees believe that various illnesses are caused because of an unbalanced *qi*, and that by practicing this type of meditation they can calm and balance their *qi*, which in turn encourages health and well-being.

At the Won Buddhist Temple, devotees follow a modernized Korean form of Buddhism that focuses on teaching ways by which one can cultivate and use one’s mind effectively in daily life. Won Buddhism promotes the use of mindfulness meditation as the main practice. The leader of the Won Buddhist temple reports that Won Buddhism encourages practitioners to practice mindfulness during different daily activities such as eating, lying down, talking, etc. However, the Won interpretation of “mindfulness” is not exactly the same as the scientific and secular form advocated by the Mindfulness Institute at Jefferson Hospital. Practitioners of Won Buddhism believe that through the practice of mindfulness meditation, they can balance the water and fire *qi* in the body. As the practitioner enters into a meditative state where delusive thoughts

disappear, the fire *qi* in the body descends while the water *qi* ascends. When this occurs, one's body and mind come into perfect harmony, which in turn enhances one's health and well-being.

In the Soji Zen Center, the practice of meditation includes Zazen and walking meditation. Zazen meditation is an activity practiced in Zen Buddhism to study the self. Our interviewee at Soji Zen Center reported that by practicing Zazen meditation, one becomes more clear minded, thus more mindful and aware. By cultivating awareness of oneself, of one's body and mind, one stops engaging in activities that are self-destructive, and focuses on finding ways in which one can take care of one's body and mind. Often practitioners notice changes in their diet and start engaging in physical activities. The interviewee put a great emphasis on the truth of discovering who we really are, and the role of that realization in one's health. Through Zazen meditation, the practitioner is striving to become aware of his or her true nature or Buddha-nature, which makes him or her respect and honor the body he or she has been given.

Chanting

Chanting is a Buddhist practice where practitioners recite repeatedly a specific phrase, also known as a mantra, that they believe to be the words of the Buddha (Buswell, 2004, p. 137). The different chants performed by practitioners differ in type, use, and meaning based on the purpose they are intended for. Chanting is used by individuals on a daily basis as part of personal rituals as well as by temple goers as part of larger ceremonies. One important aspect of this practice is the liturgical rhythm that is produced during the chanting. This liturgical rhythm is often valued more than the actual meaning of the words.

Although the literal meaning of the mantra is often not understood by the practitioners, by repeatedly chanting it, practitioners believe that the mantra itself bears the power of the whole Buddhist scripture or the deity that it represents. For instance, when the Sanskrit mantra, “Om mani padme hum,” is chanted, it is believed to awaken Avalokiteśvara, the deity of compassion, and to represent all of the Buddhist teachings. Chanting mantras during Buddhist rituals is a common practice witnessed during many of the gatherings in the Buddhist temples and centers we saw in Philadelphia. Such places include Soka Gakkai International, Chenrezig Tibetan Buddhist Center, Guan Yin Citta, Soji Zen Center, Kai Yuan Si, Rulai Si, and Thien Vien Minh Dang Quang.

At the Soka Gakkai International (SGI) Buddhist center, the practice of chanting is based on the teachings of Nichiren, a Japanese Buddhist priest, who emphasized particularly the *Lotus Sūtra*. The *Lotus Sūtra* is considered to be the most important text in Mahāyāna Buddhism, the main Buddhist tradition practiced in China, Japan, and Korea. A legend says that in the 13th-century Nichiren awakened to a realization which he regarded as the ultimate law, encapsulated by the mantra “Nam-myoho-renge-kyo,” or “Homage to the Lotus Sūtra.” SGI’s main activity is the chanting of this mantra, which they call the “Mystic Law”. They teach that the purpose of the *Lotus Sūtra* is to encourage people to realize their own Buddhahood as a positive source of energy that transforms all suffering into happiness. SGI’s weekly gatherings take place in the main room where volunteers have set up an altar space with an image called the Gohonzon. This contains Chinese and Sanskrit characters that help practitioners in their journey of achieving Buddhahood. Gohonzon is a Japanese word that means “an object of devotion.” Many of the attendees reported that they have personal altars with the image of the Gohonzon in their homes where they chant “Nam-myoho-renge-kyo,” along with portions of the *Lotus Sūtra*.

SGI members reported that they begin each practice by setting an intention about something they would like to achieve in life such as health, money, career goals, or great relationships. Interviewees reported that by chanting the Mystic Law they will certainly attain everything they desire in life. They stated that chanting has become a very important part of their life, and that they believe their devotion and daily practice are key to attaining enlightenment and everything else they set their mind to achieve. During the meeting that we had after the gathering with some of the attendees, they talked in more detail about the purpose of their movement and how chanting has changed their life. When asked about the way they view healing within their community and how this practice can improve one's health, every attendee had their own interpretation and shared their own experiences. One of the attendees associated the sound vibration produced by chanting the mantra with the body's ability to mimic that vibration, thus releasing negative energy which can cause physical or mental distress. Another attendee shared with us her mother's experience when dealing with a neurological disorder. She believes that by chanting the mantra with the intention of helping her mother recover, her mother was able to find the best doctor and the best treatment that made her recovery possible.

In Chenrezig Tibetan Buddhist Center of Philadelphia, as described above, the weekly gathering starts with the practice of mindfulness meditation, but this is then followed by the practice of chanting. During the chanting, the leader recites mantras found in a booklet that every practitioner receives at the beginning of the gathering. Attendees also join the leader in this practice by chanting and praying together. For instance, during my visit, we started the chanting by reciting the Green Tara mantra, "Om Tare Tuttare Ture Soha," which means, "I prostrate to the Liberator, Mother of all the Victorious Ones." Green Tara is also known as the "Mother of all the Buddhas," and is associated with compassion and protection. Practitioners believe that

through the practice of chanting of the Green Tara mantra they are able to discover qualities such as love, wisdom, and compassion. By cultivating those qualities, they claim to be more compassionate toward themselves and others, as well as to be able to better take care of their body and mind. Based on their beliefs, when an individual becomes more compassionate he or she can be healed spiritually.

In Guan Yin Citta temple, the small center is dominated by an area where the chanting takes place. In the middle of the altar is a statue of Guanyin, in Sanskrit, Avalokiteśvara, in Tibetan, Chenrezig, surrounded by other deities. The attendees and volunteers that we met in this temple chant different mantras to Guanyin. The purpose of the chanting is to ask for help as well as to charge up the water that they use for blessing ceremonies with the power of the chanting. The power of the chants is believed to give healing properties to the water, therefore volunteers at the temple offer holy water to devotees whenever they visit the temple to promote well-being. Moreover, Guan Yin Citta temple is affiliated with Master Jun Hong Lu, a very well-known international spiritual teacher and leader of the Chinese community in Sydney, Australia. According to the interviewees, Master Lu specializes in alleviating different illnesses such as arthritis, cancer, kidney problems, and miscarriages. Besides his ability to channel Guanyin, which helps him gather all the information about one's health, Master Lu instructs his devotees to practice chanting as part of their treatment.

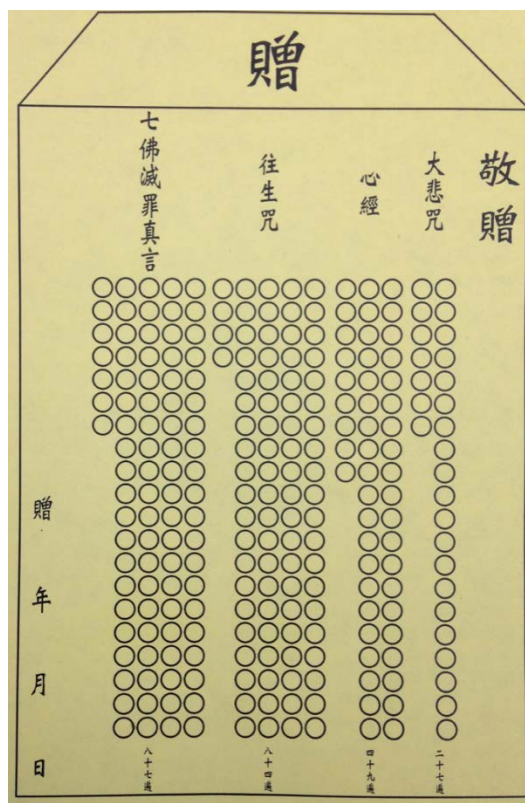


Figure 3. The image of a tally from Guan Yin Citta

Every devotee needing treatment or wanting to help someone else get treatment receives a small yellow card or tally. Each tally has the names of a couple of mantras on it, along with a certain number of little circles that represent the number of times each mantra should be chanted. When devotees chant a mantra, they tick off a circle and continue to do so until they have completed the whole card. According to the interviewees, it takes one approximately four hours to chant a card. After completing the tally each practitioner has to write down his or her name along with the name of the person he wishes to receive the benefits of the chanting. Based on the illness or the particulars of the case, devotees are instructed by the master to complete a certain number of tallies before finishing the treatment. After the practitioner completes a tally, he or she is then instructed by the master to preserve it in a red envelope and store it away from the

windows. This step is taken to ensure that the tally is not being seen by any ghost, in which cases it is believed that its power would be stolen by the ghost and the tally would be worthless.

In Soji Zen center, the practice of chanting takes place in the beginning and at the end of each ceremony. Chants are mainly performed in English with only a few words in Japanese. The chants focus on the “Three Jewels,” also known as *Triratna* in Sanskrit, which refers to the Buddha (the teacher), the Dharma (the teachings), and the Sangha (the Buddhist community). In some cases, when a Sangha member or a family member of any of the devotees is sick, practitioners chant specific mantras that promote healing. During this ceremony, everyone in the community holds the intention of healing the ill individual. They direct the group’s attention and energy to that ill individual in order to help him or her recover quickly. This is then followed by the Soji Zen’s priest carrying out specific healing rituals as instructed in their liturgical book.

In Kai Yuan Si, also a Chinese temple, reciting scriptures is one of the main activities that takes place during the public gatherings. The ceremonies are led by Venerable Zhi Kai, a Chinese monk. The Buddhist scriptures, or *sūtras*, used for the daily chanting vary based on the occasion but include the *Great Compassion Mantra*, the *Heart Sūtra*, the “Chapter on Deliverance” from the *Lotus Sūtra*, and the *Flower Ornament Sūtra*. Each practitioner also chooses a *sūtra* for home practice, which they believe will be helpful for whatever problem they may be experiencing. Most cases of disease are believed to be caused by the presence of a spirit which has not moved on to the next life. In such cases, the practitioner repeatedly recites the *sūtras* to help the deceased move on.

At Rulai Si, there are two main devotional halls where Buddhist practices and teachings take place. In one of the devotional spaces, there is an altar with three Buddha statues, while in the other space there is an altar with the statue of Guanyin. According to two of the residential

nuns, people often come to the temple to participate in the chanting ceremonies where parts of the *Diamond Sūtra* are recited. The *Diamond Sūtra* is a Buddhist scripture with an emphasis on “emptiness,” which is believed to be the basis of existence and the ultimate wisdom. The nuns believe that this practice helps practitioners to forget about their problems, to find peace when an experience or emotion is overwhelming, and to connect with the Buddhist teachings.

In Thien Vien Minh Dang Quang, a large ceremony dedicated to Medicine Buddha takes place every year. Weekly activities include mostly prayers and the practice of chanting. Chanting is performed before the main altar where the statue of Shakyamuni Buddha is placed in the center. On the right of Shakyamuni Buddha is a statue of Guanyin, and on the left is the statue of the founder of the Thien Vien Minh Dang Quang’s tradition. In the front of the altar, the volunteers have placed three small Buddha statues including Shakyamuni Buddha, Amitābha Buddha (the Buddha of Infinite Light), and the Medicine Buddha. The temple’s representative we interviewed reported that when people are sick, they write their name on a piece of paper and place it on the altar along with a lighted incense so that the monks can pray and chant for their well-being.

Prayer

Just like in many other religious traditions, Buddhist devotees often pray to someone or something external to themselves for assistance in reaching certain goals (Buswell, 2004, p.671). The Buddhist practice of prayer includes activities such as bowing in front of a deity or a Buddha, and reciting words to pay homage. Often Buddhists pray in private, but they frequently pray together as a community. Along with seeking blessings from deities, Buddhists also may

pray for other more concrete things such as health, protection, money, relationships, achieving enlightenment, good luck, or cultivating certain attitudes (p. 672). In addition, Buddhists believe that prayers can be used to help others, both the living and the spirits of the deceased. In Mahāyāna Buddhism in particular, this kind of practice is viewed as a good deed that helps the practitioner accumulate merit that can be carried over throughout his present life and in other lives after his spirit the reincarnated. Buddhist temples in Philadelphia like Chua Quan Am, Linh Quang, Wat Khmer Palelai, Thien Vien Minh Dang Quang, and Rulai Si practice prayer and/or perform blessing ceremonies to promote health and well-being.

In Chua Quan Am temple, blessing ceremonies take place in the main altar where the central figure is the statue of Guanyin. The monk we interviewed here reported that people often ask for the blessing ceremony when they are feeling sick or when they believe that they are having bad luck because a ghost is following them. The blessing ceremony is performed to help individuals push away bad luck, cure ailments, and get rid of ghosts. Often, the “Great Compassion Mantra of Guanyin” or “Mahākaruṇā Dhāraṇī” is used as the basis of the ritual. The ritual starts when the monk covers the individual’s head with a red cloth and rings a bell over the top of his head. The monk then takes the cloth off of the person’s head, and uses it to wipe the individual’s head in a downward motion while quietly reciting parts of the Great “Compassion Mantra”. The monk sprays the individual’s hands with perfumed water, and instructs him to wipe the top of his head in a backward motion three times. The ceremony ends with the individual bowing three times to Guanyin.

At Linh Quang temple, the resident monk practices prayer whenever a person is sick or on the verge of death. The monk visits the ill individual in his or her home or in the hospital. When the person is ill the monk chants parts of the *Lotus Sūtra*, along with praying to Guanyin

and the Medicine Buddha. On the other hand, when the person is about to pass away the monk prays to Amitābha Buddha. Often the monk also prays to the deities and the Buddhas so that the ill person can accumulate good karma. The notion of karma is a very important aspect of Linh Quang's tradition. Practitioners believe that bad karma can be the cause of many problems, including poor health. Through prayer, practitioners believe that the deity will help them acknowledge mistakes that they have made in their present life or their past lives so that they can pray for those mistakes and ask for forgiveness.

At Wat Khmer Palelai one of the practitioners reported to us that often illnesses are caused by ghosts and black magic. Illnesses caused by ghosts are the result of the body being possessed by a spirit. According to the practitioner, Cambodians are very "superstitious". Believing for example that a strange old woman can be a witch that does black magic, or black magic can be the cause of disease. In these cases, a monk performs a blessing ceremony where the ill individual is blessed with holy water. While offering blessings the monk also prays over the individual to enhance his well-being and improve his karma.

At Thien Vien Minh Dang Quang, whenever a member or a member's loved one is ill, the member writes down his or her name or the name of the ill person on a piece of paper and places it on the altar next to the statues of the Buddhas. Along with this, the individual lights incense, which is a common worship object. Through this practice, the devotee honors the Three Jewels and asks to be healed by the Buddhas. This activity is followed by the practice of prayer carried out by the monks, who pray to the Buddhas for the ill person's well-being.

In Rulai Si temple, practitioners are free to pray to any Buddha or deity that they prefer. Often they choose a Buddha that they already have a strong connection with. Their prayer may focus on different areas of life including health. They pray for their own and for other people's

well-being. They believe that through the practice of prayer the Buddha or the deity will help them or their loved ones heal.

Physical Activities

Physical activities related to health observed at Philadelphia Buddhist centers include the practice of yoga and qigong. *Yoga* is a Sanskrit term that means “to unify the body and mind” (Jones, 2005, p. 9893). In many Indian religions, yoga is considered to be a form of meditation that is also beneficial for health. While there are types of yoga that have developed in Buddhist circles historically, specific yoga techniques that we saw performed at Buddhist centers include *āsana* and *prānāyāma* drawn from Hinduism. *Āsana* refers to a yoga technique where the practitioner keeps his or her body stable in various therapeutic postures. The ultimate goal of the practitioner is to transcend the human condition, thus becoming free from desires and selfishness, however various physiological benefits are also claimed for the practice. Furthermore, the practice of *prānāyāma* refers to certain techniques that regulate breathing. The goal of the practitioner is to induce a respiratory rhythm that balances three essential moments: breathing in, holding the breath, and breathing out.

Yoga is practiced regularly during gatherings by members of the People of Color (POC) meditation group at Springboard Meditation Sangha, as well as in MBSR classes at the Mindfulness Institute at Jefferson Hospital. The representatives of POC reported that practitioners start their weekly practice with a half hour of yoga practice. They believe that the practice of yoga helps the body prepare for meditation. By improving body’s flexibility, practitioners remain comfortable during meditation. Through integrating mindfulness with yoga,

one cultivates a deeper awareness of the body, which has a grounding effect that causes the mind to calm down, thus making the practitioner feel more relaxed and overcome stress-related ailments.

Patients and students attending the MBSR program at the Mindfulness Institute also are encouraged to practice gentle mindful yoga. Practitioners are instructed to move slowly and consciously while letting go of any judgments of the self. They often combine the practice of yoga with meditation so that they can simultaneously experience the benefits and advantages of both of these activities. According to the representatives of the Mindfulness Institute, the practice of yoga helps one reduce stress, chronic pain, and high blood pressure. Through the integrated practice of mindfulness meditation and hatha yoga, one cultivates wisdom and self-compassion, which allow one to increase the potential for healing that the body and mind already possess.

Aside from yoga, *qigong* is another physical activity that we witnessed in Philadelphia's Buddhist Centers. This practice is focused on cultivating *qi*. *Qigong* is traditionally divided into six different categories including Taoist *qigong*, Buddhist *qigong*, Confucian *qigong*, medical *qigong*, martial *qigong*, and *qigong* used by exorcists and magicians (Pregadio, 2008). *Qigong* commonly involves slow movements (known as *donggong*), as well as an inactive meditative position where the practitioner follows the movement of the breath within the body (known as *jinggong*). The practice of *qigong* is incorporated into Buddhist frameworks by members of POC meditation group, the Mindfulness Institute, and Won Buddhist Temple.

POC meditation group and the Mindfulness Institute offer *qigong* practices along with yoga to help practitioners go deeper into meditation along the lines discussed above. On the other hand, representatives of Won Buddhist Temple claim that *qigong* can be used to treat a variety of diseases. They report that illness occurs when the flow of *qi* in the body is blocked, and the

obstruction manifests as the symptoms of a disease. Through the practice of *qigong*, the practitioner clears the blockages and allows the energy of *qi* to flow again in its natural rhythm. By continuously practicing *qigong*, one can enhance his or her mental and physical well-being.

This practice at Won also is related to the fact that the temple has established a school of acupuncture and Chinese medicine where practitioners can acquire knowledge on holistic healing and natural ways to prevent disease. Students are introduced to the meridian system, or the pathways where *qi* flows. By mastering the art of acupuncture, practitioners can affect the meridian system by inserting needles through the skin in order to stimulate the flow of *qi*. Practitioners believe that by restoring an unhindered flow of *qi* in the body, this will increase body's ability to heal itself.

Vows

Offering a vow to the Buddha or other deities is a common Buddhist act of worship. Vows are promises that Buddhists make in order to receive something in return from the deity or the Buddha being worshipped. Often a vow has to do with a specific task that the practitioner promises to accomplish, thus cultivating self-control and discipline. The most common moral vows or precepts come in groups of five, eight, and ten (Buswell, 2004, p.673). The first five precepts require one to restrain oneself from (1) harming living things, (2) stealing, (3) sexual misconduct, (4) lying, and (5) taking intoxicating substances. Buddhists are not forced to fulfill the moral rules, but they often do so in order to achieve a desired objective. Other Buddhists who would like to express a greater commitment to their Buddhist path, choose to fulfill the first five precepts along with the next three rules which refrain them from (6) eating after noon time, (7)

playing, singing, or dancing to music, and (8) using or sitting on luxurious places. On the other hand, the practice of the ten precepts is accomplished by Buddhists who would like to become monks or nuns. The ten precepts are an extended form of the eight precepts where the practitioner makes vows to strictly fulfill the first five precepts and refrain himself from (6) eating after noon time, (7) playing, singing, or dancing to music, (8) wearing jewelry, perfumes, or other cosmetic products (9) using or laying on luxurious places, (10) accepting gold and silver.

Additionally, a practice closely related to the first precept (to restrain oneself from harming living things) is vegetarianism. The practice of vegetarianism is present in most ethnic Buddhist temples that we visited during the study, with the exception of Lao, Thai, and Cambodian. According to Buswell, the correct preparation and use of food are very important to the Sangha (p.228). The legend says that when the Buddha tried extreme fasting to achieve enlightenment, he concluded that it was not effective, thus implying that liberation cannot be achieved without being properly fed. In Buddhism, food is considered a necessary component to our health and well-being. Mahāyāna Buddhist scriptures like the *Nirvāna Sūtra* and the *Lankāvatāra Sūtra* promote vegetarianism and are strongly against meat eating. Mahāyāna Buddhist countries like China and Korea practice vegetarianism to honor the first Buddhist precept against killing living beings. In Chinese and Korean Buddhist monasteries, vegetarian meals include mostly rice and vegetables.

Vegetarianism is closely related to *karunā*, or compassion, and the notion of karma. Compassion is one's wish that others be free of any suffering (Buswell, 2004, p.419). By practicing vegetarianism, individuals cultivate compassion toward animals. Additionally, many Buddhist believe that by honoring the first precept in Buddhism, they are attracting good karma

which helps them maintain good health. Importantly, practitioners also claim that a pure vegetarian diet helps with managing anger and negative emotions which can be harmful to the individual.

Although many places that we visited practice vowing during ceremonies, the use of this practice for healing purposes was only clearly present in Guan Yin Citta and the Soji Zen Center. At Guan Yin Citta, besides the practice of chanting for healing purposes already discussed above, devotees also make vows to Guanyin. They believe that vows can be used when someone wants to be healed quickly. In this case, the ill person makes a vow to Guanyin that he or she will finish the chanting later, in trade for immediate care. In order for the person to remain healed, he or she would have to fulfill all of his vows and finish the practice. When a practitioner does not fulfill his promise, he or she would very likely get sick again.

At Soji Zen Center, along with the practice of chanting the *sūtras*, members also make vows associated with desires. “Desire,” or *trishna* in Sanskrit, is an important concept in Buddhism as it is believed to cause suffering. Desires can be mental and physical, and they are categorized into three groups: desires for sensual pleasure, desires for eternal existence, and desires for non-existence. Desires or cravings are considered to be impulses that the individual is not aware of. According to the Buddha teachings, the origin of suffering is craving conditioned by ignorance. Through chanting the vows, the members of the center recognize their desires and then make vows to get rid of them. They believe that through this process they become aware of their desires, thus freeing themselves from them or looking at them in a positive light. According to the leader of Soji Zen, shifting this perspective can have a positive impact in one’s well-being because they believe that the body and mind are closely interconnected.

Scientific Research Related to Buddhist Healing Practices

Meditation

When mindfulness meditation was first introduced in the West, John Kabat-Zinn, the founder of MBSR, found a way to put it in a scientific context (Wilson, 2014, p. 37). By developing a model of mindfulness that could be carried out in a clinical setting, Kabat-Zinn was able to publish articles about mindfulness in relevant journals focusing on health. Mindfulness meditation has now become mainstream, and it is now being used in many companies, prisons, schools, government organizations, and even the U.S. military (Wilson, 2014, p. 38). Mindfulness meditation in the U.S. is now also applied and advertised outside of Buddhist contexts (Purser & Loy, 2013). According to Purser and Loy, this may unfortunately be taking away other qualities that this old Buddhist practice provides for its devotees besides reducing stress and maintaining overall health. However, although the MBSR program has its roots in Buddhism and its status as “religious” versus “secular” is contested (Helderman, 2016), our respondents strongly consider it to be secular.

De Vibe et al. (2012) present a meta-analysis study of MBSR completed by various groups of individuals including patients in hospital settings, students, therapists, and prisoners. Mindfulness practices offered through MBSR were found to improve a range of mental and somatic health problems. These MBSR participants often suffer from having chronic pain or

illnesses like anxiety, depression, and cancer (de Vibe, 2012). However, they report that practicing mindfulness has improved their quality of life, as well as helped them grow personally regarding the way they cope with stressful or challenging situations. Moreover, research on mindfulness has revealed the beneficial effects of this practice in treating mental disorders (Greeson et al., 2014). Many individuals suffering from psychological disorders (i.e. depression, eating disorders, insomnia, post-traumatic stress disorder, etc.) follow a similar pattern that contributes to the development of these disorders. They tend to suppress their emotions and thoughts, have repetitive negative thoughts, or react negatively in difficult situations. Practicing mindfulness meditation has proven to help manage these kinds of issues by making practitioners more aware of their actions and their feelings. In addition, attending the MBSR program for a longer period of time has been shown to have a greater effect on the practitioner's mental health (de Vibe, 2012).

Furthermore, research on mindfulness meditation has shown a link between this practice and its effect on neuroplasticity, the brain's capacity to alter its structure and adapt (Fox et al., 2014). According to this meta-analysis, eight different brain regions including the areas responsible for long-term memory, self, and emotional regulation, communication, body awareness, and meta-awareness, and the individual's ability to be aware of awareness, were shown to be constantly altered in meditators. Along with mindfulness meditation, practices such as mantra meditation (also known as Transcendental Meditation), open monitoring, and loving-kindness meditation, have all been shown to activate different parts of the brain (Fox et al., 2016). Further studies are being conducted to show the way neuroplasticity and brain activation can induce therapeutic changes.

Physical Activities

Although not as many scientific studies have been conducted on the effectiveness of movement-based practices as there have been on mindfulness meditation this is also a well-studied area. According to Schmalzl and Kerr (2016), these types of activities have been associated with numerous health benefits such as reducing the level of pain for cancer patients, as well as treating disorders like Parkinson's disease, fibromyalgia, post-traumatic stress disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), anxiety, and depression. In this review, the authors presented and examined the findings of different studies on the effectiveness of yoga and *tai chi*, a practice similar to *qigong*.

Yoga-based practices have been found to regulate the autonomic, emotional, and cognitive function (Schmalzl & Kerr, 2016). In addition, a study conducted among yoga practitioners and non-yoga practitioners to examine the way yoga can affect our gray matter volume in the brain demonstrated that individuals who have practiced yoga for many years are not at risk of experiencing age-related gray matter volume decline, thus yoga can have neuroprotective effects against this common phenomenon occurring among the elderly. Other studies on the effectiveness of yoga show that practitioners are much more aware of their body, which in turn helps them pay attention and understand bodily signals that may be crucial to behavioral regulation.

Moreover, yoga-based practices have been associated with lower risk of heart disease, stroke, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease which is characterized by breathing difficulties (Schmalzl & Kerr, 2016). Although there need to be more studies that will explain the way this practice works, researchers claim that yoga along with other rehabilitation programs

can effectively treat patients who suffer from these chronic conditions, as well as improve their exercise capacity and health-related quality of life (Desveaux et al., 2015).

In addition, according to a systematic review that includes articles from the Chinese and English database on the effects of *qigong* on psychological well-being, the practice of *qigong* has a positive impact on individuals who suffer from health disorders such as anxiety, mood disorders, anxiety, and depression (Wang et al., 2013). *Qigong* practices also include peer learning and social support which can be very beneficial for the patient's psychological well-being. In addition, studies focusing on the effectiveness of *tai chi* programs on attentional processes proved that *tai chi* can have a positive impact on young adults who suffer from ADHD (Schmalzl & Kerr, 2016). The authors suggest that the practice of *tai chi* may hold a potential to treat the symptoms of ADHD without the need for pharmaceutical drugs.

Chanting

Very few scientific studies have focused on the psychological and physical effects of religious rituals such as recitations and none have focused on Buddhism. One study conducted on anxiety revealed the ways it can be used to positively affect psychologic well-being (Anastasi & Newberg, 2008). Thirty students in a Catholic college participated in this study. They were divided into two groups where the first group of 12 students participated in the recitation of the Rosary, and the second group of 18 students watched religious videos. Researchers studied the groups before and after the intervention and calculated their levels of anxiety using a State-Trait Anxiety Inventory, a commonly used instrument to measure anxiety in adults. Researchers found

that the students who recited the Rosary experienced a significant reduction in anxiety compared to the other students who only watched religious videos.

Furthermore, a study conducted among Muslim patients with advanced cancer has found that there is a correlation between reciting Quran and subjective well-being (Hematti, Baradaran-Ghahfarokhi, Khajooei-Fard, & Mohammadi-Bertiani, 2015). Eighty-nine patients at the Radiotherapy Department of Seyed Alshohada Hospital in Iran participated in a 4-month study. They were required to listen, read, and watch the text of the Quran, and then answer questions regarding their spirituality, life expectancy, overall well-being, and overall quality of life. Researchers found a correlation between reciting the Quran and higher LE as well as improved well-being. According to the study, 60% of the patients claimed that frequent recitation of Quran would lead to a longer life expectancy.

Prayer

Even though there have been no scientific studies on the effectiveness of Buddhist prayers per se, researchers have examined and analyzed the effect of prayers on well-being from other traditions. These studies focus especially on intercessory prayer (IP), which is the act of praying to a deity on behalf of others. For instance, a study conducted on the effect of IP to the Judeo-Christian God found a beneficial effect in patients admitted to the coronary care unit (Byrd, 1988). Over a period of ten months, 393 patients in this study were divided into two groups. The first group received IP while the second group did not; however, participants were not aware if they were receiving IP. At the end of the study, researchers found that patients who

did not receive IP required ventilatory assistance, antibiotics, and diuretics much more frequently than the patients who received IP.

Moreover, a study conducted among breast cancer survivors from different cultural groups on the effectiveness of prayer on their overall well-being found that women had developed a positive attitude toward their life (Levine et al., 2009). When women were interviewed about their experiences of using prayer, 81% of them claimed that through prayer they were able to feel closer to God, find comfort, as well as feel more compassionate. The women who prayed were mainly African-Americans and Asians who practice Catholicism or Protestantism. In addition, another study conducted among patients who were undergoing kidney dialysis found that IP was perceived as a helpful technique for alleviating their symptoms (Conti, Matthews, & Sireci, 2003). A group of patients received IP and the other group received positive visualization. The study showed that individuals who expected to have received intercessory prayer, regardless of knowing for certain whether it happened, claimed to feel significantly better than those who expected to receive positive visualization.

In other studies, conducted among patients with cancer and HIV, prayer was found to be a good technique for helping patients cope with their conditions. Patients diagnosed with cancer claimed that spirituality helped them adjust to their disease (Garssen, Uwland-Sikkema & Visser, 2015). They stated that through prayer they felt supported by a higher entity, and that they were able to express their negative emotions and accept their life circumstances for what they are. On the other hand, HIV patients claimed to use prayer to communicate with a higher power to improve their physical and mental health, as well as to receive guidance (Jeffries et al., 2014).

Furthermore, according to a national survey on prayer for health concerns where 2055 individuals with different religious affiliations (Christian non-Roman Catholic, Roman Catholic,

Jewish, and other) or no affiliation participated, 35% of them claimed to use prayer for health concerns while 75% of them claimed to use prayer in order to maintain their health and prevent disease (McCaffrey et al., 2004). Individuals who constantly prayed for health concerns used prayer to alleviate symptoms of psychiatric conditions, pain syndromes, chronic conditions, and cancer. In addition, 72% of the practitioners who used prayer for health concerns also used conventional treatments along with it. Using prayer for health concerns is a highly prevalent practice in the U.S., and practitioners claim that it is very helpful for their recovery and disease prevention.

Vows

The effect of vows on our physical and mental well-being has not been studied scientifically. However, there has been a substantial amount of research done on the effect of vegetarianism on our health. While this practice is related to upholding vows in Buddhism, the research has focused exclusively on the nutritional implications. Although many studies support the consumption of food of animal origin, studies on the benefits of the vegetarian diet show that it is associated with a lower risk of heart disease, obesity, and higher levels of antioxidants (Ginter, 2018). The vegetarian diet is recommended for individuals following cancer treatments or as a way to prevent cancer due to the fact that it can improve our overall health and immunity system (Dupler & Frey, 2011). According to Dubler and Frey, the incidence of diseases such as cancer, diabetes, and heart disease increases with the increase in animal products consumption. Another health-related reason to follow a vegetarian diet is because animal products tend to have

more synthetic additives. According to Dubler and Frey, such chemicals are thought to contribute to the development of cancer and other diseases in the body.

Conclusion

This is the first study to present the variety of Buddhist healing practices across multiple ethnically diverse populations in Greater Philadelphia. By using a culturally relativist approach that equally values all forms of Buddhism and examines every group within their own cultural context, we were able to observe and catalogue a variety of Buddhist healing practices within Buddhist institutions in the area. This thesis presents the diversity of those Buddhist traditions and provides a richer picture of Buddhism in this area that has not been done before. It serves as a model to be applied in any other city in the U.S., or be expanded to explore the role of Buddhism in healthcare at the national level.

The qualitative data that we gathered during the study uncovered some trends that merit further discussion. First, Buddhist communities in the Greater Philadelphia area appear to be racially segregated. Based on our data, the majority of ethnic Buddhist temples that we visited are only attended by Asian immigrants, whereas few non-denominational centers are attended by both native-born U.S. citizens and Asian immigrants. According to Cheah (2011), this phenomenon is routine in the U.S., possibly due to what he terms “white supremacy,” a system that normalizes white Buddhism. This system consists of prioritizing Euro-American values, customs, beliefs, and ideas, and upholding these as norms by which Buddhism of other cultures and ethnic groups are being judged.

Hickey (2010) agrees that previous scholarship on Buddhism has not properly portrayed the role and development of ethnic Buddhism in the U.S. According to Hickey, scholars of Buddhism have tended to use a static categorization of Buddhist groups in America, which perpetuates the idea that “American Buddhism” is in fact “white Buddhism,” and that “Asian

Buddhism” is a foreign thing that does not fit the American picture. Hickey suggests that scholars should instead use a “layered” approach that first describes all forms of Buddhism and then explores and examines the development of each Buddhist group along with its specific characteristics. This layered approach, she argues, would help scholars adequately understand and effectively portray the role of Buddhism in the U.S., thus introducing authentic Buddhist values, ideas, and healing methods to the American public that may not have been acknowledged yet.

In addition to racial difference, we have also found a difference in how the two groups practice. Our study revealed that most non-Asian Buddhists are drawn to mindfulness practices perceived as secular (meditation, yoga, and qigong), and have little or no information about other healing practices such as chanting, prayer, and vows. On the other hand, those healing activities are very well-known among Asian Buddhists and are regularly performed in ethnic temples in Philadelphia, where meditation is frequently not practiced regularly. While most Buddhist institutions are completely segregated, some offer separate meetings and different practices to Asian and non-Asian members. For instance, the Won Buddhist temple offers separate Sangha gatherings for Koreans and for non-Koreans. Although we have not collected enough information to explain how a single institution maintains separation between the two cultural groups while serving both, we have noted that these institutions offer different practices and experiences related to health for each group.

Further research will be necessary to determine why Buddhist institutions catering to convert Buddhists offer mindfulness practices rather than introducing them to other ancient Buddhist practices that are very common among ethnic Buddhists in Asian temples. I would speculate that, besides the fact that such practices may not be known among non-Asian

Buddhists, another reason for such occurrence would be due to extensive scientific research conducted on the health benefits of these activities. In fact, the popularity of certain Buddhist practices among Caucasian communities tracks the amount of scientific literature on these practices quite closely.

In conclusion, this ethnographic study introduces a variety of Buddhist healing practices that we witnessed in the Greater Philadelphia area. It also introduced the scientific literature on mindfulness, meditation, yoga, and qigong, and have demonstrated some connections between these activities. I argue that scientific research needs to be applied to other Buddhist healing methods such as chanting, prayer, and vows that are currently widely practiced among ethnic Buddhists, which would open up a promising new avenue for health-related research. A lack of scientific research on these practices may be due to the fact that these activities have been undervalued in previous scholarship and have been regarded by non-Asian Americans as “foreign.” It is also possible that the causation works the other way around, with increasing scientific research following from mainstream popularization. In either event, it is clear that increasing awareness of ethnic Buddhist attitude toward health and related practices, will result in greater understanding of the spectrum of Buddhist healing as well as the diversity of health culture in Philadelphia.

Appendix

Full name: Amitayus Kadampa Buddhist Center

Address: 1102 Pine St, Philadelphia, PA 19107

Telephone and/or email: (267) 702-3817, education@meditationinphiladelphia.org

Website: <http://www.meditationinphiladelphia.org>

General information:

- Mainly attended by Caucasians
- Non-denominational

A list of practices: mindfulness meditation

Full name: Da Jue Chan Si

Address: 6332 Rising Sun Ave, Philadelphia, PA, 19111

Telephone and/or email: N/A

Website: N/A

General information:

- A Chinese temple mainly attended by Chinese immigrants
- Practice Mahāyāna Buddhism

A list of practices: N/A

Full name: Chenrezig Tibetan Buddhist Center

Address: 1417 N. 2nd Street, Philadelphia PA 19122

Telephone and/or email: ChenrezigTBC@gmail.com

Website: <http://www.tibetanbuddhist.org>

General information:

- Mostly attended by Caucasians, where half of the attendees are women.
- Practice Tibetan Buddhism

A list of practices: mindfulness meditation, visualization meditation, and dharma talks

Full name: Chua Bo De Temple

Address: 1114 S 13th St, Philadelphia, PA 19147

Telephone and/or email: (215) 389-7390

Website: N/A

General information:

- A Vietnamese temple mainly attended by Vietnamese immigrants
- Practice Mahāyāna Buddhism

A list of practices: chanting, prayer, vegetarianism

Full name: Fo Shou Si Temple

Address: 1015 Cherry St, Philadelphia, PA 19107

Telephone and/or email: (215) 928-0592

Website: N/A

General information:

- A Chinese temple mainly attended by Chinese immigrants
- Practice Mahāyāna Buddhism

A list of practices: chanting, vegetarianism

Full name: Chua Giac Lam Temple

Address: 131 Nyack Ave, Lansdowne, PA 19050

Telephone and/or email: chuagiclam@yahoo.com

Website: <http://www.chuagiclam.org>

General information:

- A Vietnamese temple, attended by Vietnamese immigrants and Caucasians
- Practice Mahāyāna Buddhism

A list of practices: *jhāna* meditation

Full name: Chua Phat Quang Temple

Address: 1001 S. 4th Street St., Philadelphia, PA 19147

Telephone and/or email: (215) 339-5121

Website: <https://www.facebook.com/chuaphatquangusa/>

General information:

- A Vietnamese temple mainly attended by Vietnamese immigrants
- Practice Mahāyāna Buddhism

A list of practices: N/A

Full name: Guan Yin Citta Temple

Address: 913 Arch St, Philadelphia, PA 19107

Telephone and/or email: N/A

Website: N/A

General information:

- A new Chinese temple mainly attended by Chinese immigrants
- Practice Mahāyāna Buddhism

A list of practices: chanting, prayer, vowing, blessing ceremonies

Full name: Kai Yuan Temple

Address: 1811 Cottman Ave, Philadelphia, PA 19111

Telephone and/or email: (917) 916-9028

Website: <https://www.facebook.com/KaiYuanTempleOfPennsylvaniaBuddhistAssociation/>

General information:

- A Chinese temple mainly attended by Chinese immigrants
- Practice Mahāyāna Buddhism

A list of practices: chanting, management of ghosts through rituals, vegetarianism

Full name: Lian Sheng True Buddha Temple

Address: 1539 McKean St, Philadelphia, PA 19145

Telephone and/or email: (267) 687-1904

Website: N/A

General information:

- A Tibetan Buddhist temple attended by Chinese immigrants
- Practice Mahāyāna Buddhism

A list of practices: chanting, mantra meditation, rituals for different Buddhas

Full name: Linh Quang

Address: 821 Ridge Rd, Telford, PA 18969

Telephone and/or email: (215) 234-0930

Website: <http://chualinhquangpa.org>

General information on demographics:

- A Vietnamese Buddhist temple mainly attended by Vietnamese immigrants
- Practice Mahāyāna Buddhism

A list of practices: chanting, prayer, recitation of spells, vegetarianism

Full name: Mindfulness Institute

Address: 1015 Chestnut Street, Suite 1212, Philadelphia, PA 19107

Telephone and/or email: (215) 955-1376

Website: <http://hospitals.jefferson.edu/departments-and-services/mindfulness-institute/>

General information:

- A secular center mainly attended by Caucasians where most of the attendees are women
- Non-denominational

A list of practices: mindfulness meditation, yoga, qigong, love & kindness classes, mindful talking, mindful walking

Full name: Thien Vien Minh Dang Quang

Address: 208 S Allentown Rd, Telford, PA 18969

Telephone and/or email: N/A

Website: N/A

General information:

- A Vietnamese temple mainly attended by Vietnamese immigrants
- Practice Mahāyāna Buddhism

A list of practices: Medicine Buddha rituals, chanting, prayer, cultivating compassion

Full name: People of Color Meditation Group

Address: 530 Carpenter Ln, Philadelphia, PA 19119

Telephone and/or email: (215) 528-2138

Website: <http://springboardstudio.net>

General information:

- A secular center mainly attended by African Americans
- Non-denominational

A list of practices: yoga, qigong, mindfulness meditation, dharma talks, gratitude practice

Full name: Chua Quan Am Temple

Address: 1239 Ridge Ave, Philadelphia, PA 19123

Telephone and/or email: N/A

Website: N/A

General information:

- A Vietnamese temple mainly attended by Vietnamese immigrants
- Practice Mahāyāna Buddhism

A list of practices: chanting and blessing ceremonies

Full name: Penn Program for Mindfulness

Address: 3930 Chestnut St, Philadelphia, PA 19104

Telephone and/or email: (215) 615-2774

Website: <https://www.pennmedicine.org/for-patients-and-visitors/find-a-program-or-service/mindfulness>

General information:

- Mainly attended by Caucasians
- Non-denominational

A list of practices: mindfulness meditation, yoga, qigong, love & kindness classes, mindful talking, mindful walking

Full name: Philadelphia Meditation Center

Address: 8 E Eagle Rd, Havertown, PA 19083

Telephone and/or email: (610) 853-8200, phlmedctr@aol.com

Website: www.philadelphiameditation.org

General information:

- Mainly attended by Caucasians
- Non-denominational

A list of practices: mindfulness meditation & mindful walking

Full name: Preah Buddha Rangsey Temple

Address: 2400 S 6th St, Philadelphia, PA 19148

Telephone and/or email: (215) 336-9547

Website: N/A

General information:

- A Cambodian temple mainly attended by Cambodian immigrants
- Practice Theravāda Buddhism

A list of practices: meditation for self-cultivation

Full name: Pumen Si Temple

Address: 1023 Race St, Philadelphia, PA 19107

Telephone and/or email: (215) 574-1398

Website: N/A

General information:

- A Chinese temple mainly attended by Chinese immigrants
- Practice Mahāyāna Buddhism

A list of practices: community shrine

Full name: Rulai Si Temple

Address: 1239 Ridge Ave, Philadelphia, PA 19123

Telephone and/or email: N/A

Website: N/A

General information:

- A Chinese temple mainly attended by Chinese immigrants
- Practice Mahāyāna Buddhism

A list of practices: chanting, prayer, meditation on dantian, cultivating compassion, vegetarianism

Full name: Soji Zen Center

Address: 2325 Marshall Rd, Lansdowne, PA 19050

Telephone and/or email: (917) 856-5659

Website: <http://sojizencenter.com>

General information:

- A secular center mainly attended by Caucasians
- Practice Zen Buddhism

A list of practices: zazen meditation, walking meditation, chanting, dharma talks, vowing, prayer

Full name: Soka Gakkai International

Address: 2000 Hamilton St # 210, Philadelphia, PA 19130

Telephone and/or email: (215) 569-2144

Website: <http://www.sgi-philly.com/Welcome.html>

General information:

- A secular center mainly attended by African Americans
- Practice Soka Gakkai

A list of practices: chanting

Full name: Soryarangsky Buddhist Temple

Address: 5415 Rising Sun Ave, Philadelphia, PA 19120

Telephone and/or email: (215) 329-4264

Website: N/A

General information:

- A Cambodian temple mainly attended by Cambodian immigrants
- Practice Theravāda Buddhism

A list of practices: meditation, chanting, blessing ceremonies

Full name: Wat Khmer Palelai

Address: 2701 S 58th St, Philadelphia, PA 19143

Telephone and/or email: N/A

Website: N/A

General information:

- A Cambodian temple mainly attended by Cambodian immigrants
- Practice Theravāda Buddhism

A list of practices: prayer and blessing ceremonies

Full name: Won Buddhist Temple

Address: 423 Abington Ave, Glenside, PA, 19038

Telephone and/or email: (215) 884-8443, WonBuddhismofPhiladelphia@gmail.com

Website: <http://wonbuddhismpa.org>

General information:

- A Korean temple attended by Korean immigrants and Caucasians
- Practice Won Buddhism

A list of practices: mindfulness meditation, mindful walking, qigong

Full name: Wongaksa Temple

Address: 627 W Cheltenham Ave, Philadelphia, PA 19126

Telephone and/or email: (215) 276-2211

Website: <https://www.facebook.com/Wongaksa-Buddhist-Temple-349259308578735/>

General information:

- A Korean temple mainly attended by Korean immigrants
- Practice Mahāyāna Buddhism

A list of practices: chanting, bowing, Buddha ceremonies, vegetarianism

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ACADEMIC VITA

Paola Xhuli
pwx5014@psu.edu

EDUCATION

Pennsylvania State University

Bachelor of Arts in Letters, Arts, and Sciences
Letters, Arts, and Sciences Honors

A Comparison of Buddhist Healing Practices in Philadelphia with Relevant Scientific Research
Pierce Salguero, Associate Professor of Asian History & Religious Studies

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Panorama Newspaper, Tirana, Albania

September 2013-December 2013

Website Designer Assistant

- Provided creative ideas to redesign Panorama's website, resulting in a more functional, attractive, and easy to use layout.
- Executed initiatives to increase the company's revenue through social media advertisement.
- Worked closely with other team members to ensure successful delivery of products and services to online users.

Cliffside Park High School, Cliffside Park, NJ

October 2011-June 2012

Peer Tutor in Math

- Helped students solve and understand math problems in Geometry, Algebra, and Pre-Calculus.
- Enforced regular practice to ensure students were prepared for the exams.
- Successfully improved student participation in the classroom through integration of a variety of problem-solving techniques.
- Developed program to work with students and increase interest in higher learning.

ACTSEC, Tirana, Albania

2007-2009

Albanian Coalition against Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation of Children
Conference Speaker & Team Leader

- Provided guidance, instruction, direction and leadership to a group of individuals for the purpose of achieving our monthly goals by providing our community with information regarding trafficking and sexual exploitation of children, and promoting a safer environment in the community.
- Improved safety for children and teenagers by implementing programs that required them to share their experiences, learn about children's trafficking, and explore ways in which they can receive help as well as assist others in this matter.
- Planned successful events to improve the life of abused children and teenagers, as well as presented several topics on Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation of Children to inform parents and children about the risks of this form of trafficking, how to identify potential trafficking victims, and how to be of assistance in the fight against human trafficking.

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Pennsylvania State University, Abington, Pennsylvania
Undergraduate Research Assistant & Team Leader

August 2015-Present

- Provided leadership and guidance for the Abington College Undergraduate Research Activities(ACURA) research team to implement a methodology that ensured that our project on "Buddhist Healing Methods in Multiethnic Philadelphia" was on schedule and was effectively studied.
- Provide research support by studying Buddhist communities in Philadelphia through observations and interviews, examining data, and drawing out conclusions.
- Develop a research thesis on Buddhism and Science which will contribute to previous scholarship
- Work closely with faculty to have proper research resources available for the research project.

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Xhuli, P. (April, 2016). Buddhism & Science: A culturally relativist approach to Buddhist healing in Philadelphia. Schreyer Honors College Thesis Presentation.

Xhuli, P. & Rose, R. (April, 2016). Buddhist Healing in Multiethnic Philadelphia. Poster presented at Penn State Regional Symposium, Lehigh Valley, PA.

Xhuli, P. & Rose, R (April, 2016). Buddhist Healing in Multiethnic Philadelphia. Poster presented at Penn State ACURA Poster Fair, Abington, Pa.

HONORS & AWARDS

Excellence in Research and Scholarship, Regional Undergraduate Research Symposium PSU
Lehigh Valley, April 2016

ACURA Honorable Mention, Abington College of Undergraduate Research Activities:
“Buddhist Healing in Multiethnic Philadelphia,” April 2016

Schreyer Honors College Annual Academic Scholarship, Schreyer Honors College, July
2014-Present

Diversity Leadership Retreat, PSU, March 2015

Penn State Global Buddy Program, PSU, September 2014

The President’s Freshman Award, PSU, March 2013

Dean’s List, PSU, December 2012-Present

LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

Fluent in Albanian, English and Italian