Japanese Buddhist Temples in Hawaii
A Case Study on the Daifuku-ji Soto-Shu Mission

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Keywords: Japanese, Temples, Community, Yonsei, Gosei

Abstract

This article examines the revitalization of a Japanese Buddhist temple in a spatial demographic changing period through a detailed case study, among the younger generation of Japanese Americans in the Kona coffee district of The Big Island of Hawaii. The Daifuku-ji Soto Shu Mission is one of the two largest temples in the area which have changed to meet the needs of the younger generation and open their door to a variety of multiethnic members. This article presents the results of an investigation of the following question: What characteristics of actors involved in these interactions affected these changes? The analyses are based on qualitative data collected from a series of in-depth individual and group narratives with an interethnic, mixed-gender.

Introduction

This ethnographic study centers on the members of Japanese Buddhist Temples on The Big Island of Hawaii. The study focuses on the Kona coffee community where Buddhist temples are an essential element to nearly all of the Japanese community. One of the main objectives in this study is to obtain insights in the revitalization of Japanese Buddhist Temples among the fourth and fifth generation young Japanese American communities. Analyzing a variety of actors, cultural and language acquisition indicators, may determine the absence or presence of Japanese American distinctiveness and its relationship to external influences from generational transformation. This indication may focus the research on the development of a multi-contextual model that may measure the existence or non-existence of acculturation. If to some extent the indications of actors, language acquisition, gender egalitarian and acculturation have occurred, then the Japanese Buddhist Americans in Kona should have a higher degree of sense of community which could explain the present revitalization phenomena among

the fourth and fifth generations.

The present approach takes into account multiple contexts and individual attachments within those context. Although it is probably impossible to cover all aspects within those contexts, but at a minimum we can improve upon the single context approach typically used in literature. This study will take into account the temples, farms, communities, and all contexts that have been examined in numerous studies.

It is of anthropological interest to determine whether these generations of Japanese Americans have preserved their culture in general and their future towards reorganization and revitalization in particular at these Japanese Buddhist temples. An abundance of literature has addressed the early immigration of Japanese Americans to Hawaii as a result of the booming sugar cane industry, yet information on the Kona coffee community is limited. In numerous works celebrating the achievements of Japanese Americans in Hawaii, such as Franklin Oda's *A Picture History of the Japanese in Hawaii, 1885-1924* and Roland Kotani's *The Japanese in Hawaii: A Century of Struggle*, the significance of The Kona coffee farmers' Japanese community is relegated to a mere paragraph or several photographs. Research work on Hawaii's labor history, such as Ronald Takaki's *Pau Hana: Plantation Life and Labor in Hawaii*, and Edward Beechert's *Working in Hawaii: A Labor History*, as well as historical overviews of Hawaii's history, such as Gavan Daws's *Shoal of Time: A History of the Hawaiian Islands*, and Lawrence H. Fuchs''s *Hawaii Pono: A Social History*, either exclude a discussion on coffee, or at most dedicate a couple pages to the experiences of the Kona coffee farming community

The Kona coffee Japanese American community has been the subject of several articles and research papers (Embree 1941; Sanada 1979; Lind 1939, 1967; Iki 1996; Kinoshita 2002; Nishiyama 1970) all deal primarily with identity and ethnic community. Here we are interested in the Japanese American transnational labor migration phenomena that at one point in time was approximately 40 percent of the population in the Kona district that started in the late 1860s (Lind 1967).

Within this well-established body of literature on the Japanese Americans in Hawaii I

could not find a single published work on the Japanese Kona coffee single family farming community with regards to these Japanese Buddhist temples which are centralized in its community. The majority of published works on Japanese labor migration in Hawaii were issues of commercial farming at large sugar plantations. I find the Kona coffee Japanese American single family farming extraordinary, unique and self-conscious of its own ethnicity.

The first priority of issues we must attend to in this section is the name of this community. Throughout the academic community in America, American historians have referred to the Japanese sugar cane migrant laborers in a pejorative manner by the term that means "Jap slaves." When I brought up the issue of offending others in publications, our participants said they wanted us to refer to them using their own term. For that reason, we refer to this community with the name they use with pride: Kona coffee Japanese farming community.

Japanese American Community Setting Geographically

Between 1868 and 1940, some 275,000 Japanese people immigrated to Hawaii and to the U.S. mainland[i]. The majority of the Japanese came from Hiroshima, Yamaguchi, Northern Kyushu, and Kagoshima prefectures (Tamura 1994). Many of the first Japanese immigrants were contract laborers working in the sugar cane farms of Hawaii and fruit and vegetable farms of California. While some Japanese immigrants gave up on America and returned to Japan, many remained, placing their hopes on their American-born children and endeavoring to provide a better future for the succeeding generation. The [ii]Issei, from Japan, faced the difficulty of creating a new life in America that included elements of their traditional culture.

Where these Japanese immigrants today reside in the district of Kona, Hawaii is not accidental. The hot and humid mountain setting on the slopes of Mt. Hualalai and Mauna Loa in Kona, Hawaii provide the ideal venue for the famous Kona coffee and a perfect haven for the Japanese Americans from the beginning of the 19th Century until present day. The Japanese American Kona coffee community is approximately fifteen miles south toward the mountains from the city of Kailua Kona along the Mamalahoa

Highway or “coffee belt” The district of Kona itself is a tract of about 840 square miles, of which a twenty-five mile strip about two miles wide running along the mountain side at an elevation of one to two thousand feet, is settled by Kona coffee farmers. In part, some of these farmers live on lease and some are land owners of two to six acres. The rocky lava with a few patches of soil here and there is planted thickly in a sort of scattered formation unlike farms in Japan where crops are planted in straight lines.

Geographically speaking, in 1959 there were approximately 300 Japanese American Families in the Kealakekua and Captain Cook areas of which, 200 were directly related to coffee farming (Morioka 1981). A few years later, with the modernization of the jet airplane cutting the time from mainland America to Hawaii in half, the tourist industry began to flourish providing attractive new jobs for the local people. As the tourist industry expanded, demand for professional workers from the mainland also brought in greater numbers of new comers to the community. For some unspecified reason, most of these newcomers usually settled outside of the Japanese community coffee farming area. At present, the Japanese coffee farmers’ communities with their Japanese Buddhist temples and Japanese Christian churches have been geographically isolated for the last 30 years. In light of this, it became clear that geographically these temples and the Japanese community are intertwined and molded by the overlapping of space by economic and the sense of community.

Japanese Buddhist temples in Hawaii

At present there are a little over 100 active temples in the greater state of Hawaii, Oahu with 66 temples and The Big Island of Hawaii with 26 and the remainder on the outer island. The Kona Daifukuji Soto Mission is the second largest temple within the Kona coffee Japanese community of practice. This year the temple is celebrating the 100th anniversary of its establishment in Kealakekua-Kona, Hawaii. At present, the Temple has approximately 160 family members which include 16% non- Japanese.

Hawaii’s Japanese American population mainly consists of the third and the fourth generations, and Buddhism continues to perform an important role in Hawaii’s Japanese society. However, it is fairly obvious to everyone that the Sansei generation of Japanese

Americans lost various aspects of their traditional cultural values and heritage which earlier generations had passed on (Matsumoto 1973; Montero 1975: Israely 1976) and the relationship of past experience, community, and cultural heritage (Hosokawa 1973; Yamamoto 1974). It has been claimed that Sansei and succeeding generations no long appear Japanese (Ogawa, 1973; Kiefer, 1974). At the same time, Sansei generations began to seriously question the values of their ancestral cultures during this time, the Japanese American Buddhist temples were at its lowest attendance, and these old traditional approaches were not appealing to the members. The outdated methodological religious teaching ability that was taught to children in these Sunday schools was inadequate to maintain young Japanese American's interest in the temples. With respect to these trends, the challenge for today's Buddhist temples is discouraging: how to make Buddhism and Japanese tradition relevant and vital to the current and the succeeding generations of Japanese Americans in Hawaii.

As with any other study, I found myself with definitional criticism which suggested that I needed to be absolutely clear concerning the type of community I was studying. In the case of the Japanese American Buddhist community, the temples in the Kona region were mainly relational communities. Members travelled from all over the area to attend services that were held in their geographic neighborhood. On the other hand, in a rural setting where a majority of residents in small towns were still of Japanese American descent, the community was much more geographic in nature, with people attending the same temple as their neighbor.

Reorganization of the Japanese American Buddhist Temples

This research attempts to explain the condition and characteristics that affected these changes in this Japanese American community. The adaptive phase of reorganization was dealt with by intense interaction, sharing and collaboration. These actions resulted in extreme measures for learning and innovation. The community of practice moved from the adaptive phase reorganization to reorganization to utilization which, created learning and innovation. Those conditions and characteristics that affected this transformation during the adaptive phase of reorganization will be discussed first. This discussion is followed with an analysis of those conditions and characteristics that affect

the changing process as the system moved into the adaptive phase of utilization.

Reorganization (The Adaptive Phase)

Improved efforts of interaction, sharing and collaboration were characteristics of the reorganization phase. These characteristics were mainly the result of several factors: new leadership, a pattern of added gender egalitarian interaction, the need for new knowledge and individuals with diverse experiences; the demand for young actors to be involved; and a number of crises or learning events which provided teachable moments.

There was no apparent division between the adaptive phase of decline/collapse and the adaptive phase of reorganization. Members of the temple began to decrease in the early 1970's, but introduction to new innovated ideas did not begin to emerge as a practice until the mid 1980s with generational changes from the upcoming young members.

During the adaptive phase of decline, members of the community of practice began to interact differently in social situations. When the smaller Japanese community began to realize that they were unable to sustain membership in the temples, they became more secretive about sharing information with non-close friends. Some members turned to Protestant Christianity or other Buddhist sects where they could meet more Japanese American friends, due to the fact that their own temple did not meet their needs as a sense of community. As a result, some women had to attend two temples or churches to keep their network of friends and family as the decline continued.

These different patterns of interaction affected the social and natural environment negatively. When men and women and even relatives shared less information with their peers, they weakened their horizontal ties. When families moved to a different temple or church, they placed additional pressure on an already stressed resource base. When they were unable to support smaller businesses with services or products, their vertical ties significantly weakened or disappeared. In addition, if men found themselves, doing business with other competitors, they further diminished horizontal ties with friends and sometimes family members. When women attended a second church, the immediate result was to increase levels of connectedness within the nuclear and extended family.

However, additional and/or alternative community friends led to less time with their original members of the temple which frequently weakened horizontal ties with family (both extended and nuclear) and community and the vertical ties they established were usually weak.

In the Beginning: The Search for Alternative

As the members in the community declined and disappeared, some individuals began to look for alternative ways of restoring or keeping the Japanese community as a viable entity. Reverend Suzuki from a Buddhist temple on the West Hawaii Kona, responded, "I was always concern about how this temple can go on, so I was just looking for something I can do here, at first I looked into what those other temples were doing and I even looked into temples in California but other temples were having the same problems. So I began to ask young members questions about what are important to them and how I can make this place happen again, and I found out incredible thing that made me turn to a different direction for the temple."

His desires to find ways to bring the temple closer to the community met with many challenges. Similar to most Japanese priests when arriving from Japan, he spoke little or no English. Furthermore, the culture had drastically changed over the last several decades. Though he found that the majority of the members of the temple sought marginal changes, he then continued in a modest way to gradually implement slight changes.

Language

His first accomplishment was improving communications between the priest and the members of the temple by changing the language of communication to English. He began by explaining his sermons in English; in addition he used storytelling to apply the teaching into practical everyday normal living. In doing so, the monthly services became educational and meaningful to everyone that attended. In addition, he taught the members of the temple the rituals associated with the special services; funerals, memorials, Obon and a few others. According to Bob, a fisherman and a part time

farmer:

> *"You know when you attend a funereal or a wake you know that box with the burning senko that is passed around to everyone. Well he told us that in India after someone dies, they burn those bodies with biyakudan wood and the relatives, friends and neighbours would each add a piece of wood to for the fire. Well to replicate the same idea we used a small fire in that box that is passed around to everyone at the service."*

According to several members, "those are the types of ideas which he put in place and was (extremely) successful which; to a lot of members were the first stepping stone to gradual changes in these temples."

Soon after, he started to introduce the written discourse in Japanese but using the English alphabet as a means of reading or sounding out the ritual chants. A few members said that, "as time went by we began to see more English in the church and even the priest, as time went by, his English got better and we began to communicate better."

As all these change began to appear, the temple down the road began to realize that these changes were having a significant effect on the entire Japanese community and therefore, started to execute changes as well. The other temple began scheduling two services. In the morning, one in completely Japanese and the other in a more English fashion. Mrs. Tanaka, "It was strange in the beginning to hear the Okyo in English, so for me I prefer to listen to the Okyo in Japanese because its tradition for me."

In terms of language, when the members were able to communicate through culturally and spoken discourse it encouraged a sense of trust. As I interviewed the participants, I discovered that when the priest was capable of conveying his message to the members of the temple, people felt closer and a sense of trust would slowly build. The temples with a priest that communicates well with its members can be noticed quickly, the positive responses from its members are revealed at once with great passion.

Early Resistance to changes

At first, the priest found it extremely difficult to convince the elderly members in the Japanese community to become involved in his new changes. Jerry, spoke about several elderly members refusing to accept the new changes which lead a few elderly members stepping down from their positions as board members. "There was this eighty year old man that was a big member here that got into a big fight with the priest and he left for about seven years, but he is back."

Part of the difficulty for most elderly members was the result of pre-existing norms, the fact that through changes there would be a possibility of outsiders being admitted to the Japanese community's temples. Also the other reason was the fact that some people prefer a status quo, many members felt comfortable of the way in which these temples were conducted. Susan an elderly member of a temple told of how the members employ the same contractor for many years to repair and maintain the structure of the temple. As non-Japanese outsiders slowly became members and gained power within the temple, they demanded a bidding system to lower costs and eliminate the old ways of operations. "You can't trust these people, they don't understand our ways."

As mentioned above, the fact that the language of communication had become English, this reform met severe early resistance as well. According to a priest, a large percentage of the elderly members prefer to listen to the sermons in the original traditional manner. In fact, there are several temples that perform two services, the morning in the traditional form and the later in English. This phenomenon is not uncommon; the Catholic churches[1] faced a similar situation in the 1960's when they made the transformation from Latin to the local language.

The New Way

The initial success the members experienced with the temple meant a new direction for many. The community was able to become closer to their Buddhist religion, which made people feel more involved with the priest. As communication between members of the temple stabilized, various innovative ideas were implemented to improve the atmosphere

of the temple. People were able to pick up a short leaflet or a book and start studying about their own religion, and begin to develop knowledge about their past traditional culture. As the younger generation began to accumulate knowledge of their Buddhist religion and culture, the elderly members who were proficient in the Japanese language had a diminishing role in the temple.

An Increased Role for Women

The reorganization of the Buddhist temples provided women with opportunities to interact differently with the changing community in practice. There seem to be several factors that fuelled this movement. The first factor was the greater egalitarian nature of the non-formal classes. Second, the existent norm encouraged women to support their husbands, families, friends, and their temple during times of hardship. Third, women provided their hard work in what was initially a labor intensive practice. All of these factors greatly increased interaction and collaboration between men and women.

Women in the past provided important roles during hard times both in the community and in the temple. As the temples began to lose some of its members, and with internal disagreements among the elderly members, and the younger generation woman slowly became active in several different roles while increasing their already high level of connectedness. The gender egalitarian nature of the classes placed both the men and the women on to some extent one step closer to equal footing.

On the west side of Hawaii in Kona the Daifukuji Soto Mission has several women on the board committee, as of 2005 the president of this temple is of non-Japanese ancestry and a woman. The phenomenon develops into something incredibly interesting as a woman priest was selected to lead the members of this temple. At present, this temple is experiencing great success with the majority of its members. One member of this temple explained that, “the attendance is up and the people around this temple seemed much more happy and just the atmosphere is better.”

New Gender Roles

The new limited egalitarian relationship between men and women resulted in the sharing of new perspectives in these temples. For the most part, the community thought women kept most men informed about various internal issues. Kelly said, "Men don't really care about little things or what's really going on as opposed to us (women)."

Several women expressed the difference between women and men. One said, "Men are out there doing the back breaking hard work and don't have time to think about stupid things like this. And women are in charge of keeping peace in the house and the garden and the kitchen, that's just the way it is. Where as we (women) keep everything in harmony and hold the family together and with this church, it brings the families together closer as a community, the men don't really care about who the active members are or who the president is this year or...."

The majority of both men and women had very similar mindsets. They added that the need of working together towards immediate needs and long-term issues, providing the necessary budget for future education (college) and social care for the elderly. Frequently, both the men and women talk about their lives and the hope that their children and grandchildren would have the same fate as to become active members of their same temple. One person mentioned, "…my worst fear is that I can think of, which could be in the near future, is my grand children have to grow up in the Big Island where they could not have the chance to attend this temple." It appears that over time, perhaps as a result of interaction the men began to have a greater feeling towards these concerns.

In terms of the future of these temples, women appear to look at these changes differently and don't really share the same perspectives as the men. As the women began experiencing an increase in equality, the admittances of non-Japanese members increased which lead to discrimination issues. For the women who had increased their active roles in the temples, their ideological approach to these issues was viewed as positive. Sue a long time member said, "Most women in our church welcome most white-outsider but it's the men that really give them a hard time, not necessary in

words but you know that kind of evil look." Several male participants added in a moderate voice that, "It would be sad when the day comes that the majority of the members are haoles." I also suspected that as additional white non-Japanese members gain power in the internal affairs of the temples, the women are facing a similar animosity from the men.

Several women strongly said that communication and interaction increased women's respect for men and also men's respect for women. Susan commented that when men realized that the women were working and doing the same things that they were doing, "they came to respect us and that made it easy for us to talk to each other, where we could go to them because they knew the ins and outs of the church so much better than we did". Increased respect led to more meaningful communication and a sharing of different perspectives.

Men who did not participate in temple activities with women felt that the temple had a lesser impact on the community. This group spoke more frequently about how it is inevitable that white outsiders will someday take control. One long time member said, "This place cannot stay like this forever".

Another factor that influenced patterns of interaction and learning was the fact that women found themselves involved in several different roles while men were involved in only one. In their household women retain their full or part time jobs, took care household work, provided addition help to their husband and attended limited amount of function in the temple. At times these roles resulted in a woman's connection of weak ties with individuals of members of the temple community. Pre-existing norms that discourage men and women who were not related from interacting with one another weakened women's ability to form vertical ties. These similar norms and the realization that women found themselves accountable for family and community enable them to more effectively develop and maintain horizontal ties. Nonetheless, as a result of the numerous roles women found themselves playing, they had less time to maintain social ties and less time to interact with the Japanese American temple community. Numerous roles then decreased women's access to resources and, as a result decreased opportunities for learning.

The men, with their energy focused on building a farm and a business, discovered that they were forced to established both horizontal and vertical ties. In the beginning this new task seemed difficult. One farmer's wife said, "He likes to stay on his farm and do farm work instead but now that he has to do other things now because I am doing other things myself."

Pre-existing norms that had prevented men from communicating with unrelated women, whether the relationship was horizontal or vertical, had also discouraged interaction between insiders and outsiders. These pre-existing norms worked in opposition to the establishment of effective vertical and horizontal ties and may have decreased some of the potential for learning as the Japanese American temple community of practice emerged.

An Increased Role for the Priest

As these temples became modernized, the role of the priest evolved. There was a need for new leadership and for priests with diverse experiences and as these changes occurred, they became more valued. The pre-existing norms for the priest in the past compared to today's standard are to a large extent out dated. The majority of the temples in Hawaii expect the priest to have a high proficiency in the English language. For the temples that are successful in Hawaii, these priests are usually locally born in Hawaii and enrolled in some limited training in Japan.

Susan a long time member of the Hongwanji Mission explained, "We got rid of the old priest because he couldn't speak good English and these Japanese priest thinks very different from us… and so on in Hilo (the other side of the island) there is this young priest who grew up here and he is so good, we can connect with him because for one thing he speaks English and he can understand Hawaii people. He goes back and forth from Hilo and here (Kona)".

In terms of culture which also functions as a means to communication among the community, the pre-existing norm enables the priest and the members of the temple to work together in a fairly comfortable manner because the first and second generation

Japanese Americans shared similar cultural values. In the case of the fourth and even fifth generation, the knowledge of authentic Japanese culture has slowly diminished which has created a lack of communication due to culture clashes that pose much difficulty among members and the priest.

According to several members, “the Japanese priests that comes from Japan are not open and friendly, I mean it’s difficult to explain but, it seems that the priest that comes from Japan just don’t want to even try to connect with the people of the church. Usually the priest will read the chants and quickly would like to retire to the back.”

Harry another member when commenting on the priests that are locally trained, “you can ask him anything about our Buddhist faith and, what makes me feel good about him is that he can explain easily so I can understand”.

Many young participants talked about how they seek the desire to know about their religion and in turn are not afraid to ask questions about their faith, in comparison to pre-existing norms of not to question their faith. Therefore, the need for religious and spiritual knowledge as people relate to their daily life has significantly changed the role of the priest. During the pre-existing norm the relationship with the members was limited to funerals, memorial services and traditional holiday services, which lead to no personal interaction or any type self fulfilling entity.

At the Daifukuji Soto Mission huge changes have occurred, with the priest and several members, of the temple services. Interesting activities including various clubs have been growing. Bill a postal service worker and a long time member said, “The new priest has set up great Dharma classes on Thursdays and on Mondays we have additional mediation classes. The whole place has truly changed with the priest being more activ e.” He went on to say, “In the past there was no way the priest would ever be a part of any of these activities.” As I observed these classes, I was surprised how huge of an impact these priests had on the members of these temples.

This particular change led to stronger vertical and horizontal ties with many members of the greater community on the Big Island of Hawaii. Other temples are continuing

to search for these types of priest, who can bring back knowledge and energy to their temples.

An Increased Role for the Young Generation

Despite pre-existing norms and the young growing Yonsei and Gosei Japanese American community, the Japanese American Buddhist Temples were force to fill the needs of this upcoming vibrant generation. The temples were sometimes forced to broaden their social ties both horizontally across the former communities of practice to communicate information and to welcome insider of the community. Most often they extended their horizontal ties to outsiders.

As the Nisei began to age, it was time for the Sansei to take control of most of the responsibilities that were held by the previous generation. Jack, a middle age member, explained that, "In the past it was difficult to do anything around here because the old timers were so harded head (conservative) but now when we took over we like to try to help out the young kids so they can have a chance to come back to this place."

During the pre-existing norms, as stated above, the priest spoke a limited amount of English so younger members had trouble in communicating with the priest and other committee members. As the transformation to the local English language was implemented there was less need for the elderly Japanese speaking members, which in the beginning was difficult for the elderly to accept. Therefore, when these roles for the younger generation became available, it created a huge opportunity for changes

Some members talked about how the younger members took over and implemented change too quickly. These younger members collectively got together and excluded most of the elder members which in turned angered many members to the point that a few of them finally decided to leave. Interaction with internal members and the changed patterns with increased collaboration accelerated the learning pattern during this reorganization phase. Carl, a middle age member,

"When I was growing up and the temple was all in Japanese, I

would have never in my wildest dream that the temple would turn out like the way it is today. We got all kinds of things going on here that we never had in the past. Since the young generation took over this place have become much open and is not as dark like before…”

An Increase role of the Temple

With the change of leadership to the younger generation, the role of the temple changed. The temple was used to generate economic capital as well as a tool for attracting and maintaining members. During the pre-existing norm, the temple acted as a place of worship with limited socializing in comparison to the present.

At the Daifukuji Soto Mission there is an orchid club with very serious flower enthusiasts from every part of the Big Island of Hawaii. The orchid club operates mainly from this temple and is widely culturally diversified with various ethnic groups. The orchid club holds monthly meetings which offer open workshops for beginners and serious orchid growers. The club frequently arrange attractive and beautiful exhibitions throughout the year. The temple provides opportunities for the outsiders and insiders to experience the culture of the Japanese American community and the religion in practice.

The Temple has also been utilized for other traditional clubs and events such as judo, karate, taiko drumming, and even weddings. As briefly stated above, during pre-existing norm these few and limited clubs and events were mainly for people of the Japanese community with very few exceptions. As the younger generation gradually gained power and interacted with the insiders and outsiders of the community, a mixture of various ethnic groups began to join these clubs and events. What is also surprising is that there has been a shift in recent years in weddings. Occasionally the temple has been performing wedding for intermarriage and non-Japanese couples.

As these active clubs and events interacted with the various surrounding communities their horizontal ties to other Japanese American communities in practice strengthened and attracted additional members and vertically contacted other people of the outer

communities. For these study participants, the temple referred to more than just being a member of this community. It referred to the affective quality of relationships between individuals and members of the community.

Conclusion

Although anthropologists have been interested in the migration of Japanese American laborers to Hawaii and California, they have mostly been unaware of the migration and settlement of the Japanese American Kona coffee single family farming community.

The traditional Buddhist temples and the rich multiethnic society centralized in the Japanese American Kona coffee farms are the kind of cultural phenomena that makes Japanese American culture "Japanese." In the very public aspects of tradition or a few general social experiences such as Japanese food and traditional folk dance, "Obon odori," it seem these people have acculturated to their new home. Instead, it has been several generations that has successfully resisted complete acculturation by tenaciously keeping a foothold on these Buddhist temples by their cultural heritage, cultural identity, and by being reminded that despite their American style house, Christian churches surrounding them and their American culture, they were in fact, Japanese Americans.

By the late 1970's, and early 1980's the Japanese American Buddhist temples on the Big Island of Hawaii had been at their lowest attendance and had begun a road to reengage the members toward reorganization. The Japanese Buddhist community members located in the center of the Kona coffee farm belt began to explore new innovative ways to revitalize its young upcoming next generation of Japanese Buddhist Americans. As these temples provided cultural heritage in terms of religion, culture, and identity prior to the declining attendance, the temple and its members took a different direction by hiring excellent leadership, implementing effective committed outreach programs, and gender policy changes. This new direction has provided the temple members with a priest that effectively communicates biculturally and bilingually, and introduces policies that help strengthen gender that was suppressed for many years.

[i] In “The Japanese Immigration,” L & C (Japan: Graduate School of Shikoku Gakuin University, 2003), Toyoshi Kase, building on the work of Frank Chuman, Bill Hosokawa, and Makoto Tsuruki, maintains, “It was not until the Meiji Era that Japan opened the country to the outside world. In fact, Meiji culture was born upon the demise of 250 years of isolation imposed by the feudal government [Shogunate], one of the foreign polices of which was to prevent Japanese from traveling abroad, to say nothing of emigration to foreign countries”

[ii] Issei, (the first generation) and Nisei (the second generation),

[1] For special ceremonies in major cities across America the Catholic Church offers a service in the traditional Latin form.

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