De Facto Congregationalism and the Religious Organizations of Post-1965 Immigrants to the United States: A Revised Approach

Wendy Cadge

Arguments about de facto congregationalism dominate recent research about the religious organizations started and attended by post-1965 immigrants to the United States. These arguments are limited in scholars' failures to consistently define the organizational *field*, and to recognize variation in what *forms* organizations take and what *processes* account for their developments. Due to these limitations, I argue that current conceptions of de facto congregationalism are best conceived of as propositions about what features immigrants' religious organizations *might* share rather than as assertions about actual similarities. I develop this argument by expanding the existing theoretical approaches and by analyzing the case of Thai Buddhist temples in America. I suggest that immigrants' religious organizations are more organizationally diverse than previously imagined and that the processes through

Wendy Cadge, Department of Sociology, Brandeis University, MS 071, Waltham, MA 02454, USA. E-mail: wcadge@brandeis.edu. Thanks to Sidhorn Sangdhanoo for research assistance. Thank you also to Debbie Becher, Elaine Howard Ecklund, Margarita Mooney, Charles Prebish, Donald Swearer, Tisa Wenger, Fred Wherry, R. Stephen Warner, Robert Wuthnow, and several anonymous reviews for comments on earlier drafts. Portions of this research were supported by the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion and the Center for the Study of Religion, the Center for Human Values, and the Society of Fellows of the Woodrow Wilson Foundation, all at Princeton University.

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which immigrants adapt their organizations to the American religious context are multidimensional rather than linear, including a phase in which diverse organizational forms exist side by side.

A large and interdisciplinary body of research describes the religious lives of post-1965 immigrants to the United States. Studies focus on immigrants' religious beliefs and practices, their religious and ethnic identities, and the religious organizations they created and/or attend. Arguments about the organizational structure and development of post-1965 immigrants' religious organizations occupy an important place in this developing literature.² Warner and Wittner called immigrants' face-to-face organizational gathering places "congregations" in Gatherings in Diaspora: Religious Communities and the New Immigration, one of the first interdisciplinary projects to describe religious life among post-1965 immigrants (1998: 8). In a subsequent review article, Fenggang Yang and Ebaugh argued that "adopting a congregational form in organizational structure and ritual" is one of the central processes that "contribute to the transformation of immigrant religion in the contemporary United States" (2001b: 270). Warner drew from Protestant-informed theoretical and organizational models when he called these religious groups "congregations," "more or less on the models of the reformed Protestant tradition" in which the congregation is a "voluntary gathered community." He named the process by which immigrants' religious organizations develop and come to resemble congregations de facto congregationalism (1994: 54).

De facto congregationalism remains a central theoretical lens that scholars across the disciplines use to analyze the development of post-1965 immigrants' religious organizations. Regardless of how immigrants organized their religions in their home countries, Warner and other scholars argue, there is a "tendency for religious institutions in the United States to assume a 'congregational form' "which Warner delineates as:

(1) a voluntary membership association whose identity is (2) defined more by the people who form it than by the territory they inhabit....

¹ See, for example, Badillo (2006), Brown (1991), Chen (2008), Eck (2007), Guest (2003), Lawrence (2002), Leon (1999), Orsi (1999), Ramirez (1999), Richman (2005), Vasquez (1999), Williams (1988), and Yang (1999).

² See, for example, Abusharaf (1998), Bankston (1997), Ebaugh (2003), Ebaugh and Chafetz (2000), Kurien (1998), Kwon, Kim, and Warner (2001), Vasquez (2005), and Warner and Wittner (1998).

Therefore it is common...that immigrant families travel long distances to their place of worship....A congregation typically features (3) lay leadership (a board of elders, directors, deacons, etc.) and (4) systematic fundraising and a system of trustees...with eventual incorporation for tax purposes as a non-profit entity, which is often, though not always, independent of any larger "denomination." Because of its lay leadership and voluntary function, there is (5) a tendency for clergy to be professionals hired as employees...Because of its voluntary, self-determined nature, the congregation also has (6) a tendency to ethnic exclusivity. Because the people who establish the congregation have multiple needs, there is (7) a tendency for it to be multifunctional (featuring more than religious "worship," including educational, cultural, political, and social service activities). Because families tend to have the day off on Sunday, there is (8) a tendency for these families to be brought together under the roof of the institution on Sunday, whatever the particular sacred day of that tradition (2000: 277-78).

This analytic lens and subsequent empirical work have led assertions about immigrants' religious congregations and de facto congregationalism, or the process by which these congregations develop, to become central to interdisciplinary scholarship about religion and immigration. Ebaugh (2003), for example, has likened post-1965 immigrants' religious organizations to nineteenth-century ethnic churches under the rubric of de facto congregationalism and numerous empirical case studies attempt to further these arguments.

The de facto congregationalism hypothesis may sound modest, but it touches on profound and central themes as regards the meaning of modernity and the changing nature of religious institutions in the modern world. For example, José Casanova (1994) argues that religions become "denominations" after disestablishment in modern differentiated states. By naming this process "denominization," he means to suggest that religions exist not as absolute or total framing institutions determining the scope, inner workings, and meaning of all social activities—as perhaps religion did in premodern conditions—but as one subunit among others within a larger differentiated social structure, meeting some human needs but not all of them. Religions no longer command political sovereignty, govern medical or scientific research, control education systems—in all these ways and more, religions have fundamentally changed their social position and role. Where once they ruled, now they follow someone else's rules. Casanova's argument is an institutional one—about what happens first and foremost to the

institutional life of religion. He does not try to identify and anatomize the religious experience of modern persons, but rather focuses on how social structures interact. His work has been a major statement in understanding the changing shape of, as his book's title puts it, "public religion in the modern world."

The de facto congregationalism approach is in many ways a parallel, but a more specific argument, to Casanova's more global vision. It proposes that, under the distinctive conditions of modern life in the United States, religions from around the world come eventually to resemble institutionally the kind of Protestant church congregation that has its roots in seventeenth-century Puritanism. Roman Catholic parishes, Islamic mosques, Hindu temples—all, when they arrive on American shores, enter into a process whereby they transform themselves institutionally into a form ultimately indistinguishable from a typical Protestant congregation.

Arguments about de facto congregationalism have not been without their critics, among scholars of religion and immigration. When applied to immigrants' religious organizations, Vasquez (2005) argues that arguments about de facto congregationalism tend not to recognize that immigrants' societies of origin are diverse and pluralistic, that some of the factors that inform organizational development may flow through transnational networks, that there are power dynamics at work in local religious groups, that immigrants experience religion outside of organizations, and that the congregational form may only be possible for well-established immigrant groups. Additionally, arguments about de facto congregationalism tend to universalize the U.S. model and to "reinforce the claim of American exceptionalism and to deny the coevalness of the immigrants' societies of origin" (Vasquez 2005: 230). To be more useful as an analytic tool, Vasquez calls on congregational approaches to be "relativized" and "stripped of normative and teleological assumptions" (2005: 234).

I build on Vasquez's critiques in this article to argue that existing arguments about immigrants' religious congregations and the process of de facto congregationalism are theoretically limited. In addition to Vasquez's points, which I agree with, these arguments are limited by scholars' failures to consistently define the organizational *field* of such organizations and to recognize variation in what *forms* organizations take and what *processes* account for their developments. As Weber (1991[1922]) argued, religion need not be congregational in form and emerges as such under particular social and historical circumstances. In Vasquez's language, "Perhaps rather than assuming that

congregationalism is the natural (or desirable) outcome of migration to the U.S., we should ask under what conditions is the development of congregational structures more or less likely" (234). The social and historical factors that shaped the development of post-1965 immigrants' religious gathering places, led them to be called congregations, and led this process to be described through the rubric of de facto congregationalism needs to be more carefully explicated and revised.

My argument developed inductively from a multi-year project about Theravada Buddhism in America that included a book length ethnographic study of one Thai Buddhist temple (Cadge 2005), a detailed description of the history of Thai Buddhism in America based on the content analysis of documents and interviews with national leaders (Cadge and Sangdhanoo 2005), and data collected about all of the Thai Buddhist temples in the United States. I discovered that the development of this population of temples could not be properly understood within current conceptualizations of de facto congregationalism, which prompted me to critically analyze and reevaluate it.³

I begin this article by pointing out analytic weaknesses of existing arguments about de facto congregationalism in addition to those Vasquez outlines. I then specifically define an organizational field of Thai Buddhist temples in America and consider current arguments through this case study. I argue that the emphasis on similarities among organizations in current conceptualizations of de facto congregationalism obscures meaningful theoretical variation and the processes through which variations are created. I conclude by outlining a series of testable propositions which may lead to further development of this revised approach. My revised approach suggests that immigrants' religious organizations are more organizationally diverse than previously imagined and that the process through which immigrants adapt their organizations to the American religious context is multidimensional rather than linear and includes a phase in which diverse organizational forms exist side by side. It further points to possible explanations for differences among organizations and to the unique ways these differences may be influencing the organization of the American religious landscape more broadly.4

 $^{^3}$ For more on this theoretical approach, see the extended case method as described by Eliasoph and Lichterman (1999) and Burawoy (1998).

⁴ This approach illustrates ways of approaching studies of religious organizations described by Chang (2003).

THE LIMITATIONS OF EXISTING ARGUMENTS ABOUT IMMIGRANTS' RELIGIOUS CONGREGATIONS AND THE PROCESS OF DE FACTO CONGREGATIONALISM

The concept of de facto congregationalism was first mentioned by Warner in a 1993 article, in which he argued that congregations or local religious communities constituted "by those who assemble together (which is the etymological root of 'congregation') rather than by the geographic units into which higher church authorities divide their constituents..." are the norm in American religious life (1066-67). He developed this argument generally and applied it to immigrants' religious organizations (as well as to Catholics, mainline Protestants, etc.).⁵ Warner (1993) referred to immigrant mosques, for example, to assert that congregational patterns were emerging among non-Christian religious groups as mosques became more than just places to pray and imams more than religious leaders but people who could marry and counsel people, visit and care for the sick, and represent fellow Muslims in local gatherings of pastors, priests, and rabbis. In a later article, Warner described how immigrant Muslim and Buddhist organizations have come to resemble "the American model of congregational life" constituted by members rather than geography and including educational and social services, more professional leadership, and substantial lay involvement (1994: 80). Warner outlined his conception of a congregation most thoroughly in the 2000 article, as quoted above, and scholars quickly picked up the idea and used it to describe immigrants' religious organizations across the disciplines.

While this description of congregations and the concept of de facto congregationalism helped clarify and organize studies of religion and immigration concerned with organizational development and the creation of sacred space, this analytic lens is limited in three central ways. First, Warner and others do not consistently define the organizational field or set of organizations they are seeking to describe. Rather than defining and identifying a specific set of organizations and making clear what can be learned from comparing them, scholars of religion and immigration tend to generalize broadly from very different sorts of organizations. These religious groups include those started by immigrants, those not started but attended by immigrants alone or in combination with their children or other native-born Americans, and/or

⁵ Arguments about de facto congregationalism have also been made, and critiqued, outside of studies of post-1965 immigrants' religious organizations, for example, Ammerman (2005), McGuire (2002), Maines (2004), and Stout and Cormode (1998).

religious organizations that include people from a range of immigrant and native-born ethnic groups. While all of these organizations include some immigrants, the reasons why the presence of immigrants alone would lead to certain organizational forms are not specified.

The analytic importance of specifying a field or set of religious groups in studies of any set of organizations is described by sociologists Paul DiMaggio and Walter Powell in their classic article "The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality" (DiMaggio 1983; DiMaggio and Powell 1991). This article describes institutional isomorphism or the process by which one unit in a population comes to resemble other units under similar environmental conditions (Hawley 1968 quoted in DiMaggio and Powell 1991: 66). Ideas about the institutional isomorphism of religious groups hover beneath the surface of Warner's description of de facto congregationalism as he explains that "organizations that copy other organizations" have a "competitive advantage" (1994: 82). Warner does not explain, however, which religious groups or sets of organizations copy which other sets of organizations or, in the language of DiMaggio and Powell, which religious organizations started or attended by post-1965 immigrants are in the same "field." ⁶ He and subsequent scholars of religion and immigration implicitly assume through their comparisons that all organizations started or attended by recent immigrants constitute one field, though such a conception is not in line with DiMaggio and Powell's conception of a field or with the history and practice of religion within post-1965 immigrants' religious organizations.

DiMaggio and Powell conceive of fields as resulting from the process Anthony Giddens termed "structuration," in which sets of organizations interact with one another, establish structures of domination and patterns of coalition, respond to increasing amounts of information, and become aware that they are involved in a common endeavor (Giddens 1979; DiMaggio 1983; DiMaggio 1991; Sewell 1992). Based on this conception of a field, religious organizations started by recent immigrants are best conceived of as multiple (sometimes overlapping) fields determined by the other organizations each interacts with, shares information with, and conceives of as part of a common task or effort. Empirically, these fields might be based on religious tradition, country of origin, geography, or some combination. Regardless

⁶ The need for more careful conceptualization of organizational fields in studies of religion and immigration is also called for by Peggy Levitt (2004).

of how they are conceived, all of the religious organizations in the United States that immigrants attend cannot comprise a single field because many of those—for example, a Muslim mosque attended by Somalis in Maine and a Protestant church attended by Chinese immigrants in California—are simply not involved in a common process of structuration as described by Giddens. They do not share a geographic location and a common religious/ethnic background; in Gidden's terms, they are not aware of each other, do not share information, do not conceive of themselves as involved in a common task, and in some cases have leaders who do not even share a common language. To better conceptualize the shape of post-1965 immigrants' religious organizations, scholars must begin by clearly specifying the field of such organizations with which they are concerned and then analyzing the organizations within that field.

The second limitation of existing arguments about congregations and de facto congregationalism concerns the precise forms that immigrants' religious organizations take as they develop. While Warner asserts that all organizations started and attended by recent immigrants tend to begin to resemble congregations along the eight dimensions of congregations quoted above, it is not clear how this form is determined and why these dimensions are emphasized. The dimensions in Warner's conceptual model are not shared by all religious organizations attended by native-born Americans, which are an extremely diverse group ranging from small evangelical churches to para-churches and mega-churches with various organizational forms (Chaves 2004). A generalized Protestant congregation is likely held up as the organizational model because it is most prevalent across the United States and perhaps because it reinforces arguments about American exceptionalism, as Vasquez posits. It is not clear why it became the conceptual model for arguments about immigrants' religious organizations and how (and why) immigrants' religious organizations would actually go about copying this generalized Protestant model. A better interpretation of the de facto congregationalism argument might lead researchers to expect patterned diversity among post-1965 immigrants' religious organizations, just as there is among the religious organizations started and attended by native-born Americans.

Third, current arguments about de facto congregationalism do not specify the *processes* or mechanisms through which immigrants' religious organizations develop into the de facto congregational form. In their descriptions of institutional isomorphism, DiMaggio and Powell argue that organizations' developments within a field can proceed through a number of processes as organizations respond to external

pressures, described through three ideal types. Coercive isomorphism results from external structural and cultural pressures such as common governmental and legal environments which might require all immigrants' new religious organizations to obtain certain tax or incorporation statuses, for example, or follow certain rules in their zoning and building codes. Mimetic isomorphism takes place when organizations model themselves on one another, often from shared uncertainties about their environments, for example through their leadership structures or weekly and yearly calendars. The third ideal type of isomorphism stems from *normative pressures* that come from professionalization, formal education, professional networks, and other shared struggles of people trained in similar ways to define the conditions and methods of their work. Among religious organizations, such isomorphism might result from the ways clergy or lay leaders are trained or are a part of the same professional networks. These three processes of isomorphism often take place simultaneously (Brint and Karabel 1991; DiMaggio 1991; Singh, Tucker, and Meinhard 1991; Morrill and McKee 1993; Strang and Meyer 1993). Warner and other scholars generally assume that a combination of coercive and mimetic isomorphism explains why immigrants develop congregations, but these processes are not named and specified.

Despite these limitations, much research about the religious organizations of post-1965 immigrants asserts that these organizations are congregations resulting from the process of de facto congregationalism. This results, in part, from the fact that many of the empirical studies of post-1965 immigrants' religious organizations are based on case studies of individual centers rather than on studies of multiple religious centers which would allow systematic comparisons to be made. Only two studies make these kinds of empirical comparisons; and in both cases, they identify variation among organizations that they cannot explain.

The first such study by Pyong Gap Min describes 131 Korean immigrant churches in New York City, showing the range of social functions these churches provide (1992). While illustrating differences in size, the number of social activities, the degree of cultural orientation, and other areas relevant to Warner's description of congregations and de facto congregationalism, Min does not develop arguments about possible reasons for these differences. My point is not that the differences are more important than the similarities, but that differences are rarely noted in research about immigrants' religious organizations and reasons for the differences are rarely explored. Just as in nonimmigrant religious groups, these organizational

differences could be patterned in important ways that provide insights relevant to studies of religion and immigration or the organizational aspects of American religious history more generally that have not yet been investigated but are broadly posited (DiMaggio 1991; Demerath et al. 1998; DiMaggio 1998).

In the second study, Ebaugh and Chafetz describe thirteen immigrant religious organizations in a range of religious traditions in Houston, Texas from which they develop a general argument about the presence of de facto congregationalism. They extend this argument to show variation among the thirteen organizations studied along a number of axes, particularly what they call "congregational structure" and "community center" organizational models (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000, 2002). The groups Ebaugh and Chafetz describe meet the criteria for being a congregational structure and/or a community center to varying degrees. They explain the commonalities they observe among these organizations as a result of their being founded by and composed primarily of immigrants. They are not, however, able to explain the differences in the degree to which each organization approximated these two ideal types. They attempt to explain these differences based on religion, the ethnicity of members, membership size, the socioeconomic status of members, and the availability of other local ethnic groups, but conclude that none of these explanations are satisfactory. They further argue that these two ideal types are largely distinct and unrelated to one another leading them to conclude with a call for more research "in order to develop a better understanding of why religious institutions do and do not adopt particular structural features" (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2002: 151).

Ebaugh and Chafetz's attempt to understand and delineate variation in the organizational structure of post-1965 immigrants' religious organizations is an important step toward clarifying organizational conceptions of immigrants' religious organizations. To further these line of investigation, researchers should follow Vasquez's lead and step back from arguments about de facto congregationalism, consider aspects of the religious organizations they study that do not fit this model, and begin to develop propositions about the factors that might account for these differences. Then they need to specifically conceive of a field, as defined by DiMaggio and Powell, and gather systematically the cross-sectional information about organizations within the field, with which they can assess organizational forms, the processes of organizational development, and possible explanations for the variation observed. I propose one way to do that next.

A REVISED APPROACH

I begin to revise arguments about immigrants' religious congregations and the process of de facto congregationalism by analyzing the complete population of organizations within one organizational field, Thai Buddhist temples started by first generation Buddhist immigrants from Thailand. For this case study, I define the field based on religious tradition and country of origin, though I might have instead defined it based on geography in the United States by examining all religious organizations started by post-1965 immigrants in a particular city.⁷

Thai Buddhist temples in the United States constitute one organizational field because they interact with one another both informally and through two national organizations, the Council of Thai Bhikkhus and the Dhammayut Order in the United States. Through these interactions, they establish structures of domination and patterns of coalition, respond to increasing amounts of information, and are aware that they are involved in a common endeavor as described by Giddens as structuration (1979). This is most evident as more established temples advise newer ones, criteria are established for different levels of membership in the two national organizations, and yearly meetings of each national organization are held in which other information is shared. Thai Buddhist temples are a particularly intriguing field because, although many belong to these two national organizations, they are not strongly connected to one another through a centralized organization, like the Vatican in Rome, which dictates policies and practices for local organizations. Their national organizations are much more like professional organizations through which information is shared but which leave individual temples with almost complete freedom to adapt to their environments.

Within this field, I assess the extent of organizational or congregational similarity among Thai Buddhist temples according to Warner's congregational criteria (2000). I find similarities among the temples based primarily on those factors resulting from the American legal and institutional context—ones resulting from "coercive isomorphism," in the language of DiMaggio and Powell. In contrast, as regards leadership forms, ethnic exclusivity, and multifunctionality, I find considerable variation in organizational aspects of the temples. Each of these aspects of the organizations' structures is based largely on local and historical

My point is not that this is the only way to define a field, but that scholars of religion and immigration need to specify a field by whatever combination of country of origin, geography in immigrants' home countries or the United States, religious tradition, etc. they judge appropriate.

factors specific to individual organizations and their histories. Below I develop two rough examples of the ways to systematize aspects of this variation and conclude with a series of testable propositions designed to continue this line of inquiry.

On the surface, Thai Buddhist temples in America appear remarkably diverse. Some, like Wat Thai LA in Los Angeles and Wat Thai Washington DC, are located in multimillion dollar Thai style buildings, while others (about half) are based in houses, mobile homes, and former Protestant churches and schools. Some are led by upwards of twenty monks and have regular cycles of rituals and ceremonies, while others are led by just one monk who performs simple ceremonies only when people show up at the temple. Most do not have formal members, and when we asked how many people attended the temple in the week previous, estimates ranged from less than ten to five hundred with an average of about ninety people. At just over half of the temples, fewer than fifty people had visited in the last week. First generation Thai, Cambodian, and Lao immigrants and their children attend Thai temples as do non-Asian Americans. At about one-third of temples non-Asian Americans are specifically involved on a regular basis, often by attending classes in English that meet separately from Asian language gatherings. While some temples include a wide range of Thai religious and ethnic activities, others focus more of their attention outside of the Thai community by having more activities in English aimed at non-Thais and by participating in educational and other events in local non-Thai communities.

To systematize similarities and differences in the structure and function of organizations within this field, I consider the organizations along seven of the eight dimensions Warner describes in his 2000 article. While important to fully assessing arguments about de facto congregationalism, I do not address the presence, number, and responsibilities of lay leaders for reasons specific to the case of Thai Buddhism. First, Thai Buddhism is based on hierarchical carefully delineated relationships between monks who function as fields of merit and lay people who offer food and other material goods to the monks in exchange for that merit (Swearer 1995). Even as lay people have taken on more temple leadership roles through administrative work, the education of children, meditation teaching in some contexts, and other functions, these hierarchical relationships continue in the United States (Cadge 2005). Second, my historical and ethnographic research suggests that the range of new roles for lay people, their titles, and the ways they operate are extremely diverse among Thai Buddhist temples, particularly because they take place in the context of continued hierarchical monk-lay people relations. These relations are more complex because different Thai monks, who live by guidelines called the *vinaya*, have adapted those guidelines differently at individual temples in ways that directly influence lay roles (Numrich 1994). It was impossible to obtain the detailed information required to assess lay people's emerging roles in the research presented here. Rather, long unstructured interviews, ideally in combination with participant observation, are needed to fully explicate the range of ways that lay people are involved with these organizations, the factors that influence their involvement, and the ways these involvements compare across temples. Because it was not possible to reliably gather data about lay people's roles at the temples studied, I decided to omit this topic from consideration and bracket it for the future in-depth study its complexity requires.

Similarities: "(1) voluntary membership... (2) [identity] defined more by the people who form it than by the territory they inhabit...(4) systematic fund raising... (8) a tendency for these families to be brought together under the roof of the institution on Sunday..."

Thai Buddhist temples display the largest degrees of similarity in structural aspects of their organizations determined largely by the American legal and institutional context. These similarities result from what DiMaggio and Powell term "coercive isomorphism" and Stout and Cormode describe elsewhere among other organizations in the religious sector (Stout and Cormode 1998). The American legal and institutional contexts provide certain structural spaces, in other words, that structure how these organizations were started and developed. All the Thai Buddhist temples, for example, have voluntary participants because there is no established state church or requirement of religious membership in the United States. Almost all religious organizations in the United States, regardless of their organizational structure or immigrant/nonimmigrant population, have voluntary participants.

Similarly, like most organizations attended by native-born Americans, immigrants' religious organizations are defined more by people than by territory, leading people to sometimes travel long distances to attend their religious centers. Temples in the greater Los Angeles area include mostly people who live in that vicinity, a result of the high density of both Thai people and Thai temples in this region. Temples like Wat Mongkoltempunee in the Philadelphia suburbs are the only temples in a relatively wide geographic radius that attract people who live at a range of distances within that radius.

All of these temples also have some provision for systematic fundraising, though they vary both in their formal tax and nonprofit status and in the degree to which they receive funds from people abroad, specifically people in Thailand. Most temples are moving toward formal 501c3 nonprofit status, and there is a clear pattern in which the older temples already have this status but it is still in process for some of the newer ones. The 501c3 status is shared by many religious organizations across the United States based on federal guidelines that govern organizational incorporation and functioning.

Much as Warner describes, the majority of the Thai temples do also have activities on weekends (Saturdays, Sundays, or both) in response to the structure of the American work week when the largest number of people are free and able to come to the temple. Weekends are not the only times people come to these temples, however. There is variation among temples with small numbers of people attending morning and evening chanting daily at many temples and also coming during the week to donate food to the monks, receive blessings, or help with chores. While most temples have scheduled weekend gatherings, several have looser arrangements, for example conducting rituals and activities when people attend rather than according to a weekly or calendar schedule.

Variations: "...Because of its lay leadership and voluntary function, there is (5) a tendency for clergy to be professionals hired as employees"

Greater heterogeneity among Thai Buddhist temples was evident along aspects of Warner's description of congregations that are less dependent on the American legislative and institutional context. First, Thai temples differ in the extent to which the leaders or monks are clergy hired as professionals and treated as such. Almost all of the Abbots and monks who lead these temples were born and trained in Thailand. They come from a wide range of different temples in Thailand and have very different educational backgrounds, leading to relatively low levels of homogeneity among the temples through what DiMaggio and Powell term "normative isomorphism." Monks who came to the States in the last ten to fifteen years likely attended one of two "missionary monk trainings" in Thailand before their departures; these are short sessions about what it is like to live in the United States, rather than training sessions about how to run Thai Buddhist temples. The monks who currently serve Thai Buddhist temples were selected to come to the States through a wide range of nonstandard mechanisms. Some temples were started when a lay person in the States contacted a monk he knew in Thailand and asked him to come to the States, while other monks were selected by colleagues and monks in the United States more systematically.

Once they arrived in the United States, Thai monks are formally a part of their temples in a variety of ways. Some are formally the heads

of the temples with decision-making and veto power, while others have no formal influence over the direction of the temple because it is officially led by groups of lay people. Numrich's case studies of Thai temples in the Chicago area illustrate examples of each model and the very different ramifications they have on temple organization (Numrich 1996). Temples also have very different norms about how monks should behave and how they are treated. At some temples, monks can drive, can have money in their names, and can handle money, whereas at other temples this is not permitted based on the *vinaya* guidelines that historically govern monks' lives (Thanissaro Bhikkhu 1996). At no temples are monks paid a salary like professional employees in other religious settings. The guidelines surrounding monks' formal roles and responsibilities and the guidelines that govern their lives are currently being worked out on an ad hoc basis, which leads to significant diversity in practice in this first generation of leaders (Numrich 1994, 1998).

Variations: "...the congregation also has (6) a tendency to ethnic exclusivity"

The degree of ethnic exclusivity and the question of multifunctionality display the widest variation or heterogeneity among Thai Buddhist temples. Only a few of the temples were ethnically exclusive and the others varied widely both in whether they included a few or many non-Thai or Thai-American people and in the ways in which these people were included. At only seven of the eighty-seven temples studied, for example, were Buddhist teachings given only in Thai language. Rather, teachings were frequently offered in Thai and Lao or Thai and English, translated by a lay person, so everyone present could understand. While sometimes it was members of the second generation who needed the teachings in English, it was frequently non-Thais such as Cambodians, Vietnamese, Koreans, Sri Lankans, or other Asians in attendance.

Some temples further included significant numbers of non-Thai and non-Thai-American people in ongoing ways. Wat Chairatanaram in Oklahoma City, for example, included large numbers of Lao people, so teachings and activities there were regularly in both Thai and Lao. Just over one-third of the temples in the population included English speaking non-Asian Americans on a regular basis. At some of these temples, everyone met together, while at others the non-Asian English speakers met separately in what Numrich has termed "parallel congregations." At Wat Mongkolratanaram in Fort Walton Beach, Florida, for example, Thai people offer food to the monks on weekend mornings and non-Asians practice meditation at the temple in the afternoon.

Variation in the degree of ethnic exclusivity was also evident in the extent to which individual temples were involved in traditional ethnic

activities that celebrated Thailand or Thai heritage versus other nonethnic-oriented activities in their communities. A number of temples participated primarily or exclusively in local events that celebrated the Thai community. The Abbot of Dhammaratanaram Temple in Tucson, Arizona, for instance, described how the monks and temple members participated in cultural exchange events by going to regular community meetings and offering Thai classical dancing, Thai kick boxing, and Thai food in the yearly fair. Other Abbots spoke more about their involvements in specifically nonethnic community activities by attending meetings about safety in their community, belonging to local chambers of commerce and/or allowing their buildings to be used for voting on American election days. Just as described by Carolyn Chen in her comparative study of a Taiwanese Buddhist temple and a Taiwanese Christian church and Fenggang Yang and Ebaugh in their comparison of a Chinese Buddhist temple and Chinese Christian Church, some temples combine participation in ethnic and nonethnic events while others focus primarily on one or the other (Chen 2002, 2008; Yang and Ebaugh 2001a).

As preliminary indicators, meant to give a descriptive sense of temples' variation in ethnic and broader nonethnic community orientation, I developed two rough measures that describe the extent to which each temple is focused on ethnic activities and/or broader community activities that are not specifically ethnic. The first ethnic orientation measure describes how Thai ethnically focused each temple is based on four indicators: (i) whether it has community celebrations of secular Thai holidays; (ii) whether it offers Thai language classes; (iii) whether it offers Thai cultural classes such as dancing, fruit carving, or boxing; and (iv) whether it is formally involved with social and political issues directly pertaining to Thai people in the United States or in Thailand, such as Thai development projects, social change efforts, voting drives, etc. I sum the number of these factors present at each temple to find that temples range from having zero of these activities (13%) to all four (6%). Among all the temples, 38% had one of these factors, 23% two, and 20% three displaying considerable variation in the degree of ethnic focus. Among these four factors, the largest percentage of temples celebrated secular holidays, followed by Thai language classes, Thai cultural classes, and involvement in Thai-based social or political issues.

To systematize the broader nonethnic community orientation of each temple, I developed a preliminary measure of nonethnic community involvement based on: (i) whether the temple offers classes or teachings in English directed toward non-Thai or non Thai-Americans;

(ii) whether the temple is involved in local or regional community issues not specifically Thai focused such as school visitation programs, volunteering efforts, or local nonethnic community organizations; (iii) whether the temple is involved with any non-Thai Buddhist groups in the region. Nineteen percent of the temples were not involved in any nonexclusively Thai-focused issues as measured by these indicators, while 24% were involved in all three. Twenty-seven percent met one of these three criteria and 30% met two. These rough indicators clearly indicate variation in the extent to which individual temples are ethnically and/or nonethnically oriented, and beg future questions about how this variation compares in different organizational fields and what factors explain variation both within and between fields.

Variations "...(7) a tendency for it to be multifunctional (featuring more than religious 'worship,' including educational, cultural, political, and social service activities)."

The final component of Warner's description of congregations multifunctionality—describes the extent to which immigrants' religious organizations are focused on educational, social service, and other activities in addition to the traditionally religious ones. The vast majority of Thai temples in the United States are multifunctional, including at least one educational, cultural, political, or social service activity in addition to their religious activities. As a first step in assessing variation in the degree of multifunctionality among post-1965 immigrants' religious organizations, I relied on the model of a community center outlined by Ebaugh and Chafetz. They describe an immigrant religious organization as a community center based on whether, in addition to religious rituals, study and education, it includes: communal celebrations of secular holidays, secular classes, mundane services for members, recreational facilities, and a community hall where social activities occur (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2002). I examined the presence or absence of all of these criteria, except recreational facilities, due to a lack of such information and the lack of theoretical justification, at each of the Thai Buddhist temples.

As among the thirteen centers Ebaugh and Chafetz described in Houston, most of the eighty-seven Thai Buddhist temples in this organizational field had some characteristics of a community center. Six percent had none and four percent had all four. The largest proportion

⁸ Variations among temples along these two indexes are not strongly related to one another and are likely related to their sizes, geographic locations, and the density of Thai ethnic groups and Thai Buddhist temples in their areas. Additional research is needed to more fully document and systematically analyze these patterns.

of temples had two activities (36%) followed by three activities (35%) followed by one (19%). A community hall in which social activities occur was the aspect of the community center model most frequently present, which is not surprisingly because the multipurpose rooms many temples build for large religious ceremonies double as these social spaces. A large fraction of temples also offered secular classes, almost always language or cultural classes rather than GED, ESL, or citizenship classes, reflecting in part the socioeconomic status of Thai immigrants. While many temples offered services like financial planning, job listings, or counseling informally, very few did so formally. The variation among these eight-seven temples is likely due, at least in part, to the size of the temple, the vision of the founders and leaders, the geographic location especially in relation to other temples and/or ethnic centers, and the socioeconomic status of participants. It would not be surprising if the variation observed here could be described, at least partially, by the same factors such as size, the orientation of leaders and participants, etc. that explain similar kinds of variation among the kinds of services available at religious centers attended by native-born Americans.

In Summary

Comparing the case of Thai Buddhist temples to the description of post-1965 immigrants' religious congregations outlined by Warner shows that the degree of organizational similarity predicted by arguments about de facto congregationalism has not taken place. Some aspects of these organizations are shared within the organizational field, particularly those resulting from coercive isomorphism enforced by the American legal and institutional context such as their voluntary membership, ecology of attendership, systematic fundraising, legal incorporation, and weekend gatherings. But there is also substantial and significant variation among these temples, specifically in the responsibilities of formal leadership and most particularly the degrees of ethnic exclusivity and multifunctionality. These variations are likely related to a wide range of factors such as the age of the temple, the education of its founders and attenders, the size of the temple and geographic location in which it was founded, and the goals and orientations of the people who have and continue to play central roles in the organization. Variation might also be related to the state of the institutional field or population of Thai Buddhist temples in the United States when individual new temples were started. Some of this variation also almost certainly results from the opposite of normative isomorphism, the fact that

	Original De Facto Congregationalism	Revised De Facto Congregationalism
Organizational Structure	Homogenous	Heterogeneous
Organizational Model	Single model (Protestant)	Multiple models (reflecting diversity in American religion)
Field	Undefined	Range of empirically based researcher-articulated conceptions
Process	Not addressed	Theorized via coercive, mimetic and normative isomorphism
Emphasis	Similarities	Variation
Research Design	Overgeneralized from an unsystematic set of observations	Systematic observations within a given researcher-defined field
Conclusions	Asserted rather than demonstrated empirically	Presented as a set of empirically testable propositions

FIGURE 1. ARGUMENTS ABOUT DE FACTO CONGREGATIONALISM: CURRENT VERSION VERSUS REVISED APPROACH.

the leaders of these temples were trained as monks in a wide range of ways and to varying degrees in different parts of Thailand (Figure 1).

The empirical patterns evident among Thai Buddhist temples suggest hypotheses about distinct stages and mechanisms in the development of immigrants' religious organizations. Of course, the data about individual temples over time that is necessary to specifically assess these stages for Thai Buddhist temples does not exist, because so many temples did not produce or keep their early historical records. Nonetheless, to the degree that these stages can be evaluated based on the data about temples in different stages of historical development, it appears that the institutional and organizational coercive isomorphism of Thai Buddhist temples (and other immigrants' religious organizations within the same field) likely takes place in the early stages (the first few months or years) of a religious organization's existence in the United States, because they are necessary for the organizations to exist in this context. Other organizational and cultural similarities resulting from normative isomorphism do not take place until there are structures in place through which religious leaders are trained and regularly

communicate, which likely varies by tradition and region and may take a substantial amount of time to develop.

Aspects of post-1965 immigrants' religious organizations which result from mimetic isomorphism should be more carefully studied. Based on this case study, they may not take place in the first generation to the degree posited by previous researchers. Furthermore, the organizational model which serves as the example to be imitated is not clear, nor is the exact process through which mimetic isomorphism takes place. Sociological and historical studies of other religious traditions suggest that, rather than expecting organizational similarity in the first generation of leaders and/or members of the religious organizations post-1965 immigrants start or attend, such isomorphism may not occur until the second or third generation, as has been shown, for example, in studies of the Buddhist Churches of America and some Japanese Zen temples in the United States (Kashima 1977; Asai and Williams 1999). If this is the case, the organizational ecology of religious organizations generally, and particularly those started and/or attended by first generation immigrants in the United States, is likely to remain variable and complex for some time to come.

CONCLUSIONS

Arguments about congregations and the process of de facto congregationalism—arguments which are widespread in the sociology of religion—should be revised and expanded. As outlined in Manuel Vasquez's critiques (2005) and expanded through the case study presented here, these arguments are best taken as possibilities about these organizations' structures, rather than actualities about how they are organized and operate. To continue in this trajectory, scholars across the disciplines must first start with a clear conceptualization of the organizational field of interest, a conceptualization based on theoretical justifications beyond the assumption that organizations started and attended by immigrants are different from those started and attended by native-born Americans in their organizational structures. Recent survey data shows that the vast majority of immigrants are Catholic, further necessitating, at minimum, more careful thinking about how the presence or absence of existing organizational and institutional structures like Catholic parishes and the Catholic Church obviously influence the ways that immigrants start, join, or create face-to-face religious gatherings in the States.9

⁹ See, for example, Casanova 1997, Jasso et al. (2003), Menjivar (1999, 2003).

In addition to more clearly conceptualizing the organizational field, more detailed information about a range of organizations within that field should be gathered and analyzed to assess organizational similarities and differences. The case study presented here shows variation within one potential field and possible ways different types of isomorphism might account for that variation. This study raises the possibility that the variation among these temples may be related to when individual temples were founded, what the broader state of the field was when individual temples were started, where they were geographically located, who started them and how those people were trained, etc. The year of origin, along with monks' English language abilities and geographic location seem to be the most salient factors in organizational similarities and differences across all of the temples described; the temples described here that were started before 1980, for example, have much more in common with each other than do the temples started later. This case study also suggests future hypotheses about the extent to which similarities among religious organizations within a field may be related to the generation of the people who lead and attend the organization and where in its generational development the organization itself is.

Do religious organizations in the United States, over the long term, develop in homogenizing directions, and what accounts for the persistence of kinds of variation between different religious communities? Propositions about this range of possible explanatory factors need to be developed and investigated with reference to the three kinds of isomorphism DiMaggio and Powell describe. To illustrate, I present one set of possible propositions here outlining hypotheses about the relationship between the generation of an organization and organizational structure that could be investigated in future research that includes immigrants' religious organizations across generations:

Proposition 1: The degree of organizational homogeneity within a given organizational field (as described by the eight factors in Warner's 2000 description of congregations, for example) is related to the generation of the organizations in that field with organizations in the first generation showing the least homogeneity and organizations in the most recent generation showing the most.

Proposition 2: Post-1965 immigrants' religious organizations will be organizationally homogeneous in all generations in aspects of their organizations that result from coercive isomorphism (i.e., from aspects of their legal/governmental contexts).

Proposition 3: Post-1965 immigrants' religious organizations will be more organizationally homogeneous as a result of normative

isomorphism in degrees in generations above the first as leaders are trained in more similar ways, have more formal overlap, etc.

Proposition 4: Post-1965 immigrants' religious organizations will be more organizationally homogeneous as a result of mimetic isomorphism in generations above the first generation as organizations in a given field get to know more about one another and conceive of themselves as involved in a common endeavor.

Proposition 5: Rather than approximating one particular organizational form in any generation, all organizational fields which include religious organizations attended by post-1965 immigrants will retain a degree of heterogeneity and will approximate the diversity present with fields in the American religious environment more broadly.

These propositions and others like them will enable scholars to conduct the kinds of empirical research necessary to continue to overcome the limitations in current approaches to de facto congregationalism and expand their thinking about the differences among religious organizations started and attended by post-1965 immigrants. Right now, by and large, scholars only see these religious organizations' similarities, but the differences are there, as outlined by Vasquez and evident in the empirical studies by Min and Ebaugh and Chafetz described earlier, even if they have not been fully recognized and theorized. By defining specific organizational fields more narrowly, based on Giddens' understandings of structuration and investigating the processes by which organizations within those fields develop, areas of organizational homogeneity and heterogeneity can be further identified and the significance of their variations unpacked.

These broad patterns may also further inform Casanova's arguments about the processes through which religion in modern differentiated states takes denominational forms after disestablishment (1994). As the beginning of this paper noted, presumptions of the homogenizing powers of modernity are powerful in the social sciences and have been for quite a long time. Casanova's argument that religions in the modern world must become "denominations" within a larger differentiated social structure, meeting some human needs but not all of them, is a rich and empirically acute formulation of this tradition. And Warner's de facto congregationalism argument offers a nuanced and insightful parallel to such visions, specified to the particular character of religion in the United States. Part of what this paper has attempted to show, however, is that this account must be nuanced to take account of cultural particularities. Some forms of isomorphism—legal, for example—are more clearly visible than others. This may require some

reconfiguration of Casanova's central argument, to take account of the possible persistence of some forms of cultural specificity under conditions of modernity.

Such investigations are likely to lead to the conclusion that there is the same kind of diversity among Thai Buddhist temples and other religious organizations started and attended by post-1965 immigrants as there is in other religious organizational fields in the United States as a whole. Some organizations started by post-1965 immigrants look like Protestant churches overall; others resemble community centers, and still others resemble para-churches or mega-churches. These variations further contribute to debates about religious and cultural adaptation among post-1965 immigrant groups by showing that the process of adaptation is multidimensional rather than linear and includes an initial phase in which many diverse organizations are created and exist side by side. To fully explicate the range of ways post-1965 immigrants influence the American religious context, scholars must recognize patterned diversity in the organizations they attend and then theoretically reframe their questions, as modeled here, in ways that will inevitably change our understanding of immigrants' religious organizations and the ecology of American religious organizations more broadly.

APPENDIX

Research Methods

The information presented in this article was gathered as part of a multi-year project about Theravada Buddhism in America, part of which concerned the migration of Buddhism from Thailand to the United States. Thai Buddhism first arrived in the United States in the 1960s as changes in the immigration laws led increasing numbers of Thai-born people, professionals first and later people from a range of socioeconomic classes, to migrate to the United States. The first Thai Buddhist temples were started in the 1960s and 1970s, and by 2001 eighty-seven Thai Buddhist temples led by 350 to 375 Thai monks born and trained in Thailand were located in twenty-nine states across the United States (Cadge and Sangdhanoo 2005).

Research assistant Sidhorn Sangdhanoo and I contacted all eighty-seven Thai Buddhist temples that existed in the United States in 2001 and interviewed the Abbot or head monk of the temple. This list of temples was created from the complete population of Thai Buddhist temples in the United States based on comprehensive lists of current temples on

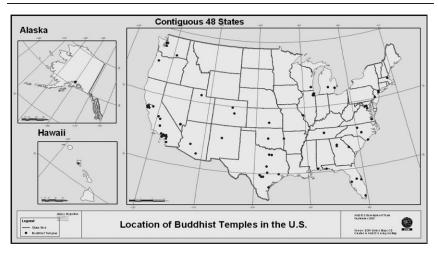


FIGURE A1. MAP OF THAI BUDDHIST TEMPLES IN THE UNITED STATES, 2001.

numerous web sites. We attempted to contact each temple through repeated telephone calls, Internet searches, and conversations with the owners of Thai restaurants in the vicinities of hard-to-reach temples. Interviews with the Abbot or head monk were generally conducted in Thai and lasted between thirty minutes and two hours. These interviews covered the history and development of the temple, its organizational structure, regular activities and other topics. A copy of the interview guide is available upon request. Additional information about this research approach is described elsewhere (Cadge and Sangdhanoo 2005) (Figure A1).

The data gathered in these interviews was triangulated with information collected through the web sites and publications of these temples as well as through two years of participant observation at one temple in Philadelphia and the content analysis of documents and interviews with national leaders of Thai Buddhism in the United States (Cadge 2005; Cadge and Sangdhanoo 2005). Without resource constraints, data about these temples gathered from the Abbots would have been examined in the context of information gathered in interviews with lay participants at each temple. The information presented here is the only systematic information that has been collected about the complete population of organizations started by immigrants from a particular religious tradition from a particular country who currently reside in the United States.

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