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**Title:**
Upward or downward? The importance of organizational forms and embedded peer groups for the second generation

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**Abstract:**
Second generation assimilation outcomes have been hotly debated amongst migration scholars. While there is a general tendency in the literature to emphasize the positive outcomes of ethnic religious organizational participation, this article explores how some youth downwardly assimilate even though they actively take part in such organizations. This project, on the greater Seattle area Vietnamese Buddhist youth organizations, explores how organizations of various forms, and the peer groups formed within these organizations, play a crucial role in mobility outcomes. Based on 53 interviews with second generation Vietnamese-Americans, this study shows how participation in organizations that are based on horizontal peer groups can result in various assimilation outcomes including the creation of oppositional youth cultures, while organizations centered on vertical intergenerational groups can induce normative values. This article suggests migration scholars refocus on studying the processes that lead to different assimilation outcomes.

**Keywords**
Assimilation, Second Generation, Ethnicity, Race, Asian American, International Migration, Organizational Sociology, Vietnamese American, Buddhism

**Introduction**

The post-1965 immigrant population's growth in recent decades has re-raised questions about whether and how their children, the second generation, will integrate into American society.[1] A few perspectives on second generation integration have risen to prominence over the past twenty-five years. The dominant theory, segmented assimilation, was created after scholars noticed divergent integration paths especially among ethnic minority youth. Segmented assimilation posits that the second generation will assimilate into different segments of American society based on varying structural barriers, capital, and prejudices (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001; Portes and Zhou, 1993). The theory invited challenges as scholars attacked its merits on both theoretical and empirical grounds (Alba and Nee, 2003; Waldinger and Catron, 2016; Waldinger and Feliciano, 2004; Waters et al., 2010). Points of contention certainly exist between the camps but both sides believe that ethnic religious organizations (EROs) linked to the broader institutional and cultural environment play a prominent role in helping integrate the second generation into society. Scholars of religion have also investigated how EROs positively influence the experiences of immigrants and their children (Carnes and Yang, 2004; Chafetz and Ebaugh, 2000; Hagan and Ebaugh, 2003) and can help facilitate school success and adaptation to American society (Zhou and Bankston, 1998). There is a general tendency for scholars studying immigrant incorporation to correlate ethnic religious organizational participation with upward assimilation. Nevertheless, why do some second generation youth downwardly assimilate despite

participation in ethnic religious organizations?

This study reconsiders the relationship between ERO participation and assimilation outcomes by asking: How do various ethnic religious organizational forms and peer networks embedded in these organizations affect the assimilation process? This qualitative study focuses on the role played by Gia Đình Phật Tử (GDPT), or the Vietnamese Buddhist Youth Association, which is the umbrella organization for Vietnamese youth groups in Seattle. Contrary to the general assumption, this study examines how ERO participation can promote upward *and* downward assimilation pathways among the second generation. Refining Zhou and Bankston's (1998) classical study of second generation Vietnamese-Americans by applying organizational sociology principles (Blau, 1955; Blau et al., 1966; Ouchi, 1977), I illustrate how various organizational forms and embedded peer networks can play more pertinent roles in determining assimilation patterns than merely organization participation. On the one hand, EROs that are centered on *horizontal* peer groups can result in oppositional youth cultures. On the other hand, EROs that feature *vertical* intergenerational groups (including parents of members, and adult members and leaders) can reinforce traditional Vietnamese values and the aspiration to upwardly mobilize (Zhou and Bankston, 1998: 222).

This paper will start by describing the present state of the second generation immigrant literature, focusing specifically on segmented assimilation and dissonant acculturation, and on linkages between ethnic organizational participation, organizational theory, and mobility outcomes. I then discuss Vietnamese-Americans and the central role Gia Đình Phật Tử plays in many Vietnamese-American communities. After describing my methodology and field sites, I show how various organizational forms and their embedded peer networks affect assimilation

outcomes and I close with a discussion and conclusion.

**Segmented assimilation and dissonant acculturation**

Assimilation is a contentious paradigm for understanding immigrant integration because it is a historical concept filled with normative claims. The term was coined and widely accepted by social scientists in the early 20th century; it was later discredited in the mid-20th century, only to be rescued from 'the dustbin of history' in the early 21st century (Brubaker, 2001). Segmented assimilation helped re-legitimize the assimilation paradigm by correcting assumptions made by early immigration scholars. Scholars note how immigrants from different backgrounds are incorporated into their new society in disparate ways, and how recipient communities also vary in their reception of immigrants. Therefore, researchers (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001; Portes and Zhou, 1993) hypothesized that, rather than integrating into one mainstream community, immigrants integrate into *different* segments of society. Upward assimilation forecasts that some of the second generation will acculturate and integrate into American society at higher rates of upward mobility than their parents as reflected by markers such as difference in income, educational attainment, and language acquisition. Downward assimilation posits that others will experience low levels of social mobility and risk the prospect of dropping from their parent's economic position into an American underclass due to the hourglass economy and persistent racial discrimination. Downward assimilation is characterized by low aspiration for higher education, low college attendance, high rates of substance abuse, and criminal offences (Bankston and Zhou, 1995). Segmented assimilation has become the dominant concept in the immigration literature (Haller et al., 2011; Stepick and Stepick, 2010) and also been a lightning rod of criticism for numerous scholars (Hirschman, 2001; Waldinger et

al., 2007; Waldinger and Feliciano, 2004; Waters et al., 2010).

For segmented assimilation scholars, assimilation outcomes depend on four factors: the history of the first generation, the pace of acculturation, the obstacles which second generation youth face, and the family and community resources with which they confront these barriers. These factors vary but create three distinct typologies: consonant, selective, and dissonant acculturation. Dissonant acculturation, the spark of the immigration debate and focus of the paper, describes a loss of parental authority and a role reversal that could lead to intergenerational conflict. Dissonant acculturation puts children at risk of downward assimilation because it undercuts parental authority, an important mechanism to supporting upward assimilation outcomes amongst the second generation.

**Ethnic organizational participation, organizational theory, and mobility outcomes**

Zhou and Bankston's *Growing up American* expands the segmented assimilation theoretical framework to directly discuss the importance of ethnicity, ERO participation, and social capital in assimilation outcomes. For the second generation, ethnicity acts, not as a hindrance, but rather a catalyst for upward assimilation by interweaving the second generation into a '…multiplex social system of family or kinship ties, religious ties, organizational ties, and work ties…' (Zhou and Bankston, 1998: 222) that helps reinforce traditional values and aspirations to upward mobility.

There are two parts to Zhou and Bankston's argument. The first is that ethnic organizational participation enables upward mobility because the ERO, by reinforcing an ethnic identity, embeds the youth into the local ethnic community. This embeddedness enables the mobilization of ethnic resources and employs a type of social control over the second generation

as adults can monitor their actions (Zhou and Bankston, 1998: 99). The second part is that the organizational form influences the structure of embedded ethnic peer group and therefore affects the ways in which the second generation assimilate (Bankston III, 2014). The focus of their project, participation in the Catholic Church, promotes upward mobility by connecting the adolescent member to vertical intergenerational ties of authority that reinforce traditional Vietnamese values and the aspiration to upwardly mobilize (Zhou and Bankston, 1998: 222). These 'community-prescribed values' (222) derive from the local ethnic community, specifically the first-generation parents and adults.

The positive effects of ERO participation have also been highlighted by numerous migration scholars studying religion. Ethnic organizational participation can provide social support and ethnic solidarity (Jeung, 2005; Mooney, 2009; Warner and Wittner, 1998), help reconstruct gender norms (Alumkal, 1999), and perhaps lead to civic engagement for individuals who participate in EROs (Cadge and Ecklund, 2007; Foley and Hoge, 2007).

The focus on how structural forms can influence organizational outcomes implicitly borrows from organizational sociology, specifically Blau's (1955, Blau et al., 1966) hypotheses on organizational dynamics and the complex relationship between organizational size and bureaucracy (measured as the ratio of administrative staff to workers). Countering Weber's (1978) claim that bureaucracies are rational mechanical systems, Blau (1955) highlights the ways in which organizations are structured along informal channels of interaction and socio-emotional exchange. These informal systems such as peer groups are crucial in allowing organizations to properly function and achieve their goals. Blau (1970) also proposes that increasing organizational size increases structural complexity (differentiation) which increases pressures for

coordination (increase in administrators). Nonetheless, as the size of the organization increases, the number of administrative units inevitably decrease. This paradox accounts for the inconsistent association noted between organizational size and bureaucratization. Consequently, for organizational scholars, there is much concern regarding the interactions between the formal structure (an ERO) and its informal features (peer groups) and how these interactions might affect organizational outcomes (assimilation outcomes) (Mayhew, 1973; Mayhew and Levinger, 1976; Mayhew et al., 1972; Ouchi, 1977). Drawing from organizational sociology, I suggest migration scholars need to focus on how various organizational forms affect mobility outcomes. More precisely, involvement in some forms of ERO can backfire to the extent that they may expose second generation youth to oppositional youth cultures.

**Vietnamese-Americans and Gia Đình Phật Tử**

The Vietnamese second generation is of sociological interest to scholars for several reasons. The first reason is the population's sheer size. Per the 2010 Census, the Vietnamese population is the fourth largest Asian community in the United States at 1.74 million (US Census Bureau, 2010).[2] In addition, scholars have noted the remarkable bifurcation in the second generation of Vietnamese-Americans. Kibria (1993) suggests the 'valedictorian and delinquent' hypothesis wherein Vietnamese-American youth are moving in two opposing directions in their integration. The divergent outcomes offer scholars analytical leverage to explore the various mechanisms of segmented assimilation.

The ability to explore divergent outcomes is tied to the recentness of immigration from Vietnam. The Vietnamese immigrants came in three waves, starting in 1975 and ending in the early 2000s.[3] The first wave occurred promptly after the fall of Saigon in 1975. This wave

mainly consisted of highly educated individuals from urban areas who had the means to immigrate. The second wave occurred around 1978 and lasted until the mid-1980s. This wave consisted mostly of two million Vietnamese who fled Vietnam in crowded, unsafe boats. The final and most recent wave occurred from 1980 to 2000, as many individuals were sponsored by the US government as part of a humanitarian operation (Espiritu, 2014). Immigrants in the last two waves were often less educated, came from more rural areas and had a more heterogenous class background than participants in the first wave. The recentness of Vietnamese migration means that most Vietnamese-Americans are either first or second generation.

An organization that plays an influential role in assimilation trajectories is Gia Đình Phật Tử (GDPT), which literally means 'Buddhist Family'. The GDPT plays an oversight role for many Vietnamese Buddhist youth groups in America. The Vietnamese Buddhist Youth Association was created in Vietnam in the 1960s by Buddhists who were concerned that the dharma was being lost amongst the youth in Vietnam. It was later brought to America after 1975. In theory, all GDPT units have the same goals, insignias and logos, and follow the same rules (BYA, n.d.). Youth groups that affiliated with GDPT tend to be concomitant with Buddhist temples because they share a mutually beneficial relationship. The study's participants suggest that there are well over 100 youth groups in the US, with the majority situated in California and Texas.[4] Washington State has approximately 10 youth groups which are loosely affiliated with one another and occasionally co-host events. The GDPT community in Washington was vibrant in the early 1990s, serving as places for children of immigrants to congregate, but membership dropped as youth groups entered the 21st century (Bach, 2013). The resources of the youth group are highly attractive for the later waves of Vietnamese immigrants who did not possess many

resources upon arrival to America.[5] Second generation Vietnamese and the GDPT are an appropriate organization for this study both because of the influential role of the organization on members and because of the divergent assimilation outcomes that those members went on to experience.

**Methodology and field sites**

Data for this article come from 53 in-depth interviews with generation 1.5 and second generation Vietnamese-American Buddhists and from participant observations of four youth groups located in the greater Seattle area during the summer of 2011 and 2017–2018. To control for religion in assimilation outcomes, I interviewed only Vietnamese-Americans who identified as Buddhists. Since mixed ethnic origins complicate identity in different ways, I excluded Vietnamese-Americans of mixed ethnic ancestry to avoid conflating unique identity processes. To understand the effects of youth group participation on ethnic identity, I conducted 33 interviews with current and ex-members and another 20 interviews with Vietnamese Buddhist youth not affiliated with youth groups. I followed up with some members when their initial responses were not clear. I interviewed male (28) and female (25) members over the age of 18. The participants ranged from 18 to 35 years old at the time of the interview; the relatively young age of the respondents reflects the recentness of Vietnamese immigration to America. The interviews were conducted mostly in English, but there was some dialogue in Vietnamese when the appropriate English term could not be expressed. I was part of a youth group for most of my life, and consequently I have distant ties to the organizations whose members I interviewed. I used snowball sampling as several youth group leaders initially put the potential participants in contact with me.

The four youth groups I focused on are Lotus Petal, Dharma, Gautama, and Bodhi.[6] I focused on these four because they are the largest and/or most established youth groups in Seattle. Lotus Petal, Dharma, and Bodhi are located within a three-mile radius of each other in Seattle, while Gautama is located 20 minutes away in one of Seattle's suburbs. Each youth group is supported and housed by a local temple. These temples provide the group leaders with the infrastructure, resources, and legitimacy that they need to operate. At its peak in the mid-to-late 1990s, Lotus Petal was the largest youth group in the state of Washington, with well over 100 members. Lotus Petal's large size is linked to its affiliation with the Yellow Flower Temple, the preeminent Vietnamese temple in Seattle. Yellow Flower's endowment is immense because a large number of laypeople worship there and donate money. Lotus Petal is a focus of Seattle's Vietnamese community, and its youth group enjoys the attention and resources that Yellow Flower draws. Nonetheless, Yellow Flower dealt with major debt issues starting in the late 1990s that inevitably led to the decline of Lotus Petal's attendance and support.

The offshoot of Lotus Petal is Gautama, whose leaders cited philosophical differences in the direction of the youth group as the reason for the break. For various reasons, Gautama could not find a permanent temple to house them. Gautama organized activities at local churches, community centers, and the homes of their leaders. Unsurprisingly, the lack of permanent infrastructure and resources limited Gautama's ability to build a large membership. Recently, Gautama closed after years of ineffectively recruiting new adult and adolescent members to their temple in Renton, a suburb of Seattle.

Bodhi is a mid-sized youth group that was established in the early 2000s. At one point in the mid-2000s, Bodhi and Gautama were both housed in Central Temple. Central Temple created

Bodhi, while inviting Gautama to meet at its temple to raise its profile amongst the local

Vietnamese community. Gautama was eventually exiled as Bodhi became stronger and

Gautama's leaders had disagreements with how Central Temple was treating its members.

Dharma's history is separate from the other youth groups I interviewed. Dharma began in

1999 and kept a low profile until attendance boomed in the late 2000s. Vietnamese parents were

happily sending their children to Dharma because it was housed at a respectable temple and had

a cleaner image.

**The importance of peer networks at temple**

Confirming the first part of Zhou and Bankston's argument, my initial findings show how

important youth group peers are for second generation Vietnamese-Americans. Participation in

these groups embeds the second generation into the Vietnamese community and extends the

social control of the organization and peer groups onto their lives. Refining the second part of

Zhou and Bankston's argument, the second finding illustrates how various organizational forms

can influence assimilation outcomes. Some youth groups rely on horizontal peer groups; others

on vertical intergenerational groups. The former could lead to various assimilation outcomes

while the latter is commonly associated with upward mobility.

The formation of strong ethnic ties at youth group interweaves the second generation into

the ethnic community which, in turn, enables social control and mobilization of resources. Like

other research on adolescents and the importance of their peer groups (Card and Giuliano, 2012;

Case and Katz, 1991; Haynie and Osgood, 2005; Kandel, 1978), this project on Vietnamese

youth groups shows that, rather than remembering the institution, the participants discuss the

importance of their peer group. Twenty-eight of the 33 interviewees with affiliation to the youth

groups emphasize the significance of these friendships. For these interviewees, only familial bonds rival those formed at youth group. The 20 non-affiliates mentioned how peer groups formed in other organizations (such as school, study groups, and sports teams) influence their lives. But only three mentioned how these peer groups match familial ties. Interestingly, four non-affiliates were aware of acquaintances who attended temple and explicitly wished that their parents enrolled them.

There are two reasons for the formation of deep ties at youth group. The first reason is the self-selection process of many attending members' parents. Youth groups' resources are highly attractive for disadvantaged parents upon coming to America. Many parents coerce their children to attend youth group every week. Consequently, many of the members come from similar socio-economic backgrounds in Seattle and share many other commonalities including similar context of reception and parents' human capital. Youth group members experience similar problems to those that plague many second generation youth. These problems include dealing with overbearing immigrant parents, being bicultural, and dealing with conflicting identities. At times, these problems are unique to second generation immigrants, and family members and non-second generation peers thus cannot relate. Youth group members can build solidarity and navigate through the trials of being second generation Vietnamese together. The second reason is the extended duration of youth group attendance for many members. Members attend for several years between the ages of 7–18, a crucial period during which they form identities, values, and aspirations. Consequently, members feel that they grow up as Vietnamese-Americans together at youth group.

Johnny, a generation 1.5 former youth group member, discusses the formation of these strong bonds and why these youth group ties are stronger than school friendships:

> Interviewer: How come you felt more comfortable around your sinh hoat [youth group] friends than your school friends?
> Johnny: I grew up with them; they speak the same language as me (laughs). I guess that mentality just sticks... For me, I grew up… I was ten when I came over here, or 9 or 10… but 10 in Vietnam is really different than 10 over here, you remember a lot more things… I already have an identity established as a Vietnamese person when I came over here. When I was going to school, there wasn't a lot of Vietnamese… So I didn't really hang out much. So by the time I got to high school, all those guys I know in middle school are mostly guys that hang out with me at Chua [youth group]. So it just happens because we're like childhood friends pretty much, it becomes more… I associate more closely with them than other people.

As noted by Johnny, these youth group bonds are strong because Johnny and his peers built solidarity and navigated the trials of being Vietnamese-Americans together. Johnny could not relate to his high school friends because they did not share the same language, identity, or mentality. He attended the youth group for several formative years as an adolescent which contributed to the formation of these strong ties.

Tran, a 28-year-old ex-member at Gautama who sold marijuana illegally in the mid-2000s, provides insight on the importance of GDPT friendships. Instead of citing the influence of the organization itself, Tran states, when asked about his experiences at Gautama:

> Man, I didn't like learning Vietnamese and Buddhism. I think I was in the same [Vietnamese] class for 2 years [laughs]. My parents wanted me to go every week but the only reason I went was because of my friends I made there. It was just really cool to be around people who got it, you don't have to explain why you have a shrine for the ancestors in the living room or why my clothes smell like rice. I could relate to these boys but the guys at school, they just didn't click with me. We grew up together and learned from each other… they mean so much to me.

Tran's experience reflects the influence of parental selection on members' attendance at youth groups. His parents forced him to attend initially but he kept going because of the commonalities he shared with his peers. Johnny and Tran's experiences at youth group highlight the importance of the temple peer groups. Like many other GDPT affiliates, their relationships and subsequent solidarity were firmly encouraged by their parents and strengthened over time even as they stopped attending youth group. Ultimately participating in these peer networks embeds these individuals into the local Vietnamese community, and extends the social control of the organization and peer groups onto their lives.

**Horizontal peer group structure at GPDT**

On paper, GDPT is designed to emphasize the autonomy of horizontal peer groups with supplemental leadership provided by adult leaders. Youth group members are separated by gender and grouped into three main branches based on age: sparrow (6–12 years old), youth (13–17 years old), and adult (from 18 years of age) (BYA, n.d.). If the branches are too large, as is the case for all four temples, then they are broken up into smaller peer groups. Members will spend time with other members beyond their subgroup in Vietnamese or dharma class, but the youth groups are intended such that the individual intimately interacts with those in their smaller peer groups. Monks, nuns, and adult leaders are supposed to guide these subgroups (BYA, n.d.). Nonetheless, in practice, monks and nuns are not involved in coordination and the number of adult volunteers willing to become designated leaders varies with each youth group. As a result, there is significant variation in the autonomy of peer groups at temple.

The power of peer groups and the lack of adult leaders are noticeable at Lotus Petal and Gautama. For Lotus Petal, a spike in membership in the late 1990s led to a disproportionate ratio

of adolescent members to adult leaders. Several adult leaders commented on feeling overwhelmed by the number of children and responsibilities at Lotus Petal during this time. For Gautama, the lack of adult leaders stemmed from organizational instability. Without a temple to house them for several years, Gautama could not effectively recruit and maintain adult members who could take on leadership responsibilities. There were numerous instances where adult members would attend for a few months before joining another youth group that offered more stability.

The absence of adults led to the rapid promotion of adolescents to leadership roles in Lotus Petal and Gautama. After passing leadership workshops and completing Buddhist training, these adolescents were entrusted with responsibility over a peer subgroup. The quick ascension of juvenile leaders led to numerous issues concerning authority. When asked about leading a peer group at Lotus Petal as a teenager, Tan jokingly replies, 'Leadership? I was the same age as everyone else. How was I supposed to lead when no one would listen? I think they respected me. But I was one of them, you know what I'm saying? It didn't matter if I knew Buddhism better than them…' As Tan suggests, he was responsible for taking care of a subgroup but oftentimes had little control because his peers did not see him as an authority figure.

Without supervision of adult members, these horizontal peer groups served almost as autonomous subunits at Lotus Petal and Gautama. For example, after the main ceremony on Sunday mornings, each subgroup was given 15 minutes to meet, with the intent of connecting contemporary news with Buddhism, paying weekly dues, and planning for future events. In some instances, particularly with the male subgroups, these 15 minutes would be a time to bond and converse about anything *but* Buddhism. Dylan, a former member of Lotus Petal and Gautama,

states, 'No one paid attention enough in class to even talk about it [Buddhism]. And you know

how complicated that shit is?' The freedom to discuss other topics is partly attributed to a lack of

adults that monitor the behavior of the peer groups at Lotus Petal. When asked about adult

supervision, Dylan reflects briefly before answering, 'Not really. I mean you'd have someone

walk by once in a while, but we'd change the conversation to something else … And you know,

there was like 50 of us and only a few of them.' As Dylan suggests, as Lotus Petal's attendance

increased, the administrative component (personnel directly engaged in coordination) did not

keep pace. Lotus Petal had to rely on juvenile leaders and, in time, horizontal peer groups

yielded much influence over the lives of adolescent members.

**Horizontal peer groups and downward assimilation**

Twelve of the 33 youth group affiliates experienced downward mobility. All 12 were

members of Lotus Petal or Gautama youth groups that primarily relied on horizontal groups. An

example of how horizontal peer groups can induce downward assimilation is shown in the

experience of Mike, a former member of Gautama, who was incarcerated several years ago.

Mike got involved with drug dealing through his friends at youth group.

> Interviewer: What did you think about dealing drugs?
> Mike: Like I said earlier, I don't think it was that bad. We just needed to make quick cash
> where we grew up. And from what everyone was telling me, selling drugs was an easy
> way to buy new shoes and maybe get a car.
> Interviewer: Did you think of dealing drugs before your friends introduce[d] you to it?
> Mike: No… not really. It wasn't something I thought about... They told me how much
> money you could make, how easy it is… and the ways you can do it without getting
> caught. It seemed simple enough [to obtain the drugs and receive commission from
> deals].
> Interviewer: Who [specifically] introduced you to it?
> Mike: Dylan knew the most about it. He started to deal first and he told some of our
> friends. Those friends started to deal too and they told me how easy it was and how it

goes down.

Mike's experiences with dealing drugs illustrate how influences from horizontal peer groups can induce specific behaviors that eventually shape assimilation outcomes. Mike was introduced to drug dealing by his youth group friends. They detailed the specific procedures and rules with which he can make money by peddling drugs. Mike's peers also outlined the potential rewards if he followed the 'simple' rules and procedures. Eventually drug dealing became 'easy' as Mike learned from multiple friends who had drug dealing experience.

Another example of how horizontal peer groups influences assimilation outcomes is the experience of Jeff, a 30-year-old ex-member who attended Lotus Petal for four years. Jeff lives with his sister, earns income by fixing cars, suffers from alcoholism, and did not consider attending college.

> Interviewer: Have they [youth group peers] influenced your life in any way?
> Jeff: Yeah, definitely. They probably have the biggest influence. I would do anything for them… We do things together. If they do something, I'll have to jump in and do it too… I remember growing up if one of us got in a fight [against an opposing team in the Filipino basketball league] we all had to jump in even if you didn't feel like it. If you didn't then you're considered a bitch, you weren't part of us.
> Interviewer: Are there other examples of them influencing your life?
> Jeff: They probably influenced me to do bad things [laughs]. Like I remember starting out, they wouldn't do [school] homework. And then I didn't either. They took days off [of school]. So I did too. They didn't attend college because it wasn't worth it so I didn't too… It was stupid [laughs].

Jeff admits that, while playing in the Filipino basketball league, 'if they do something,' he would jump into the fray as well. He perceived fighting as an obligation central to the way in which he earned respect *within* his group. Jeff's decision to fight occurs in response to

anticipated sanctions from his youth group peer group if he does not fight. This influence extends well beyond the basketball court. Jeff's friends impelled him to skip homework, miss school, and to perhaps not attend college. Jeff acknowledges these as 'bad' or 'stupid' practices but adopts them anyway because of his friends' possible sanctions. These choices have affected Jeff's life in numerous negative ways and led to downward assimilation. He had the ability to do well in high school and attend college but decided not to do so in part because the importance of his peer group's perception of him.

There was a lack of adult members and leaders at Mike and Jeff's youth groups (Gautama and Lotus Petal). In two separate follow-up interviews with Mike and Jeff, both similarly scoff at the notion of adult supervision at youth group. 'You serious?' Mike ask rhetorically, 'How would we talk about drug dealing with adults around? Either we'd stop attending or not talk about it.' When I brought up how adult leaders joined the youth in activities at other temples, Jeff looked surprised before stating, 'That makes me think of them [adult members] playing pickup basketball. We would have made fun of them... But I think that would mean a lot, to be honest … to have someone care like that. And who knows they probably would have not let us fight so damn much.' As both Mike and Jeff suggest, the subgroups were almost autonomous entities since adult members were largely absent in their youth group experiences. Without the social control of adults, these horizontal peer groups could induce divergent assimilation outcomes at temple.

**Vertical intergenerational group structure at GDPT**

Even though the general form of GDPT is predicated on peer groups, the autonomy of these peer groups varies within each organization. At Dharma, a smaller youth group that has

been housed in the same temple since its inception, there were juvenile leaders who were supported by an abundance of adult members who regularly attended events and monitored the actions of the peer groups. The presence of adult members simultaneously empowers the juvenile leaders and lessens their burden.

During several of the 15-minute meetings at Dharma, I observed how adult leaders would affirm the leadership of adolescent leaders and monitor the actions of the peer subgroup. Unlike Dylan's experience at Lotus Petal, adult leaders at Dharma would sit with one group or actively move around two or three groups without losing the cadence of the conversations. On an exceptionally warm Seattle morning, Linh, an adult member, intently listens into a conversation concerning different ways of learning in school. In a specific conversation, Linh explains how meditating before taking exams could improve academic achievement. As a subgroup was discussing the difficulties of the SATs, Linh interjects:

> I don't know about you, but my heart was always pounding so hard before I took finals. I think about what will happen if I don't pass… all negatives. But then I meditated for a minute before taking an exam… Once you start taking the exam, you'll have positive lucid thoughts, nothing to clutter your mind.

As Linh finishes, Brixton, the adolescent leader of the group chimes in, 'Yeah it [meditation] worked for me. I did it the second time I took the SAT and it helped a lot!' Linh continues, 'See? Brixton knows what I'm talking about! He's a smart guy… better listen to him!' Linh's presence and guidance lessens Brixton's responsibility and empowers Brixton by suggesting that Brixton is intelligent, and his opinion should be heeded. Unlike Lotus Petal, at Dharma the growth of the organization does not outpace its administrative capabilities. Peer groups do not operate

autonomously but under the guidance of adult members.

**Vertical intergenerational groups and upward assimilation**

Of the 21 members who experienced upward mobility, 16 members were part of Dharma or Bodhi. At Dharma, a small youth group, there were many instances where adult leaders normatively influence the behavior of the juvenile members. During some free time Lisa, a 34-year-old adult leader, was doodling in her notebook when she overhead one of the members and Tony, the adolescent leader, discussing not fighting a classmate after a heated argument. Tony says that not fighting was the right action. Lisa addressed them after looking up from her notebook, 'Tony is right... I think you made the right choice. What would fighting fix? … You're the bigger person.' Lisa affirms Tony's leadership and his advice on not fighting. From her perspective, talking through the conflict and not physically fighting was the correct decision. After the meeting Lisa quietly mentions to me, 'The [juvenile] leaders are trying their best. They're on the right track but sometimes I weigh in on the conversation. I make it a point to listen and give advice [on how their actions will affect their future.]' When adult members like Lisa weigh in on conversations, they are putting *weight* onto the words of the juvenile leaders. In addition to reconfirming the juvenile leader's authority, their presence can minimize negative normative actions such as having physical altercations at school.

The influence of adult members extends beyond the temple. Lisa and her partner, Loi, would often treat the adolescent members to milk tea after youth group hours. She makes a point of celebrating the accomplishments of the members. During the summers, many of the accomplishments involve college acceptances or the completion of internships. After buying drinks, Loi makes an informal toast to Christine, an 18-year-old female member, who will be

attending Washington State University in the fall, 'Being accepted to college is a big deal. A huge deal. Not everyone has the opportunity… And we all expect you to become a doctor [grinning].' Loi normatively influences the young members by affirming the importance of academic achievement. He highlights how difficult attending college is for the second generation but also acknowledges that having a successful career is the next logical step. The actions of Lisa and Loi are common at Dharma. The adults try to spend time with young members at and beyond the temple to build a genuine connection and affirm positive behaviors.

In addition to affirming positive behaviors, adult members sometimes sanction the young members outside of temple. At a different milk tea outing, Isaac, an adult leader at Dharma, firmly rejects the notion that traditional Vietnamese values are unimportant for the second generation in a lively conversation started by two members in middle school:

> It [Vietnamese values] is very important. I think what you're saying is wrong, to be honest. I mean you can believe whatever you want. But I think it serves as a compass for your actions. How would we know which way was up [north] if we don't rely on it? And at the end of the day, it's something we can rely on. Something that doesn't change.

Deferring to Isaac, the group of teenagers nods their heads in agreement before changing the conversation to a lighter topic. As this section shows, youth groups with a more balanced ratio of adult to teenage members possess a vertical intergenerational group structure. Or simply, peer groups *with* adult supervision. These adults empower teenage leaders and help sanction and affirm the behavior of the subgroup at and beyond the temple.

**Discussion and conclusion**

This article illustrates the importance of organizational forms and embedded peer groups in shaping the divergent assimilation outcomes of second generation Vietnamese-Americans. I

first argue that being a member of a Vietnamese Buddhist youth group and the formation of strong ethnic ties at youth group embed the adolescent into the local ethnic community and extend the social control of the organization and peer group into their lives. Secondly, I contend that, for youth groups with a disproportionate number of juvenile members to adult leaders, the onus is on adolescent leaders to regulate their peer groups. The reliance on teenage leaders and horizontal peer groups without adult supervision can result in dissonant acculturation because it lacks and/or undercuts parental authority. On the other hand, for organizations with a balanced ratio of adult leaders to teenage members, there is a vertical intergenerational group structure. The adult leaders empower the juvenile leaders and normatively regulate the conduct of the peer subgroups. Instead of undermining parental authority, youth groups that feature vertical intergenerational groups can reinforce traditional Vietnamese values and the aspiration to upwardly mobilize.

These findings contribute to the immigrant incorporation and immigrant religion literatures in several ways. First, because assimilation outcomes of the second generation will continue to be of utmost importance for the foreseeable future, this study contributes to the critical engagement of general assumptions in the segmented assimilation literature. More specifically, it is necessary to consider how embeddedness in an ethnic community can lead to divergent assimilation outcomes (Menjivar, 2000; Portes and Sensenbrenner, 1993). The second contribution is illustrating the fruitfulness of adopting principles and perspectives from a range of subfields to study immigrant incorporation. As organizational sociologists have long discussed (Blau, 1955; Weber, 1978), organizations have emergent characteristics and principles that can differently affect organizational members and outcomes. These *sui generis* properties of ethnic

organizations should be highlighted in the study of religion, immigration, and assimilation outcomes.

The continued participation of adults is important to the vitality of local ethnic organizations and, by extension, the wellbeing of the second generation. Some of the adult interviewees stopped attending youth group because they perceived weekly participation as too tedious or perhaps ineffective. Nevertheless, mentorship at ethnic organizations is a slow but necessary process, particularly for disadvantaged immigrants and their children, the second generation.

This study has several limitations and suggests potential avenues for future research. A reliance on horizontal peer groups does not necessarily promote downward assimilation. At Bodhi, a youth group that relies on horizontal peer groups, interviewees discussed the normative influence of their peer groups. It would be of interest for future work to explore how other factors such as parental human and economic capital interact with organizational form in affecting assimilation outcomes. My study reveals a gendered effect on mobility outcomes. All the individuals who experienced downward assimilation are male. This gendered effect, specifically how female children of immigrants tend to educationally outperform their male counterparts, has been documented in numerous studies (Feliciano and Rumbaut, 2005; Kibria, 1993; López, 2003; Rodríguez, 2003; Rumbaut, 1994, 2008; Sánchez et al., 2005; Zhou and Xiong, 2005). It would be pertinent for scholars to continue examining the interactions between gender and mobility outcomes. These findings derive from the experiences of Vietnamese-American Buddhists in the American context. Hence future research, using various methodologies, is needed to explore the relationship between organizational forms, assimilation

outcomes, and other categories of analysis such as gender, ethnicity, and class.

The theory of segmented assimilation has influenced a generation of scholars studying immigration and the second generation. The theory has endured critique from all comers. Nonetheless, scholars should not dismiss the theory entirely; rather, scholars should press forward to clarify conceptual ambiguities associated with the theory and use principles from other subfields including organizational sociology to test its hypotheses and efficacy. For scholars who believe segmented assimilation does not suffice, the agenda is to create an alternative framework to better understand the divergent outcomes of immigrants and their children. At an unsettled time under the Trump-led administration when funds for programs that assist disadvantaged groups are being cut and civil rights are being questioned, it would be of sociological interest to better understand how ethnic organizations can better can improve the wellbeing of the second generation.

## Notes

[1] Post-1965 immigrants are those who arrived after the Immigration and Naturalization Services Act of 1965.
[2] This statistic includes those who identified as Vietnamese or Vietnamese-Americans. And those who identified as solely Vietnamese or in any combination of another ethnic group.
[3] The immigration from Vietnam to the US continues today through family reunification, international students, and high-skilled immigrants. But these numbers are substantially less than in the 25 years after the end of the Second Indochina War.
[4] Bach (2013) believes there are upwards of 250 Vietnamese Buddhist chapters in America.
[5] These resources include tangible and intangible items. The former includes letters of recommendation, community service hours, Vietnamese language proficiency, and knowledge on Buddhism. The latter includes mentorship from older Vietnamese group leaders, friendships with other members, exposure to navigating and using the complicated Vietnamese kinship terms. A related benefit to youth group participation is it serves as a day camp or babysitting service of sorts. Parents drop their kids off for several hours on the weekends where they are supervised and fed.
[6] Indeed, all names of specific persons and locations are pseudonyms.

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