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Bunko Bishop: Swami Mazziniananda, the Udana Karana Order, and the Buddhist Mission of North America

One of the most unusual, influential, and overlooked figures in the early history of Buddhism in the United States was Swami Mazziniananda (pseudonym, unknown–1931), a former patent medicine salesman and quack doctor who became a spiritualist minister and fortune teller while claiming dubious credentials as a Buddhist bishop at the turn of the century. This article traces the rise of Mazziniananda and his connections to the Buddhist Mission of North America, as well as the circumstances surrounding their split and his final years. I suggest that the best way to understand the figure of Mazziniananda—his mixture of Buddhism and occultism, real engagement with other Buddhists and fabricated titles and rituals—is as a type of Buddhist “wandering bishop.” Finally, I argue that in light of his close ties with the Japanese Buddhist establishment, the influence of his liturgy and hymnals, and the deep engagement with the occult by his contemporaries and the members of the Dharma Sangha of Buddha that preceded him, Swami Mazziniananda is best seen not as a marginal or atypical figure, but rather as central and emblematic of the Euro-American Buddhist converts of his time and the deep linkages between occultism and the history of Japanese Buddhism in America.

Keywords: American Buddhism – Buddhist Mission of North America (Buddhist Churches of America) – Jōdo Shinshū – Metaphysical Religion – Occultism

On a late October evening in 1905 in the Sawtelle district of western Los Angeles, twenty-seven Americans formally converted to Buddhism. The group of businessmen, educated women, and elderly veterans of the American Civil War assembled for the ceremony in a modest venue that was filled with sympathizers and incense smoke on the inside, and surrounded on the outside by curious onlookers who extended out into the street. After a musical introduction and roll call, the initiates heard a sketch of the Buddha’s life and then made a series of vows based on the five lay Buddhist precepts: abstain from killing, believe in enlightenment, lead pure lives, refrain from lying, and avoid

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1. “Initiated To Udana Karana,” *Los Angeles Herald*, 20 October 1905; “Take Buddha As Their Idol,” *Los Angeles Times*, 20 October 1905, p. I13.

Japanese Religions, Vol. 44 (1 & 2): 33-63

intoxicants.¹ This was not the first time that Euro-Americans had formally become Buddhists: Henry Street Olcott took pancasila vows in 1880, Charles T. Strauss converted in a ceremony led by Dharmapala in 1893, and about a half-dozen Americans from San Francisco became Buddhists and formed the Dharma Sangha of Buddha in 1900. The event in Los Angeles, however, was undoubtedly the largest of its time, and as the initiates of the Udana Karana order openly talked about building a new Buddhist temple for themselves in Los Angeles, it seemed that a significant chapter in the history of American Buddhism was poised to be written.

The details of the ordination, however, suggest that something was seriously amiss. After the ceremony, the newly-minted Buddhists “gave an exhibition drill in the Hindu deep-breathing exercises” and talked about “developing mediums at Buddha’s shrine.”² The Buddhist cleric who led the service claimed to be the “master of the Temple of Benares” and described the enlightenment of the Buddha as a matter of astral travel. He wore an outfit consisting of several robes and turbans of different colors (and an additional tartan sash), and his name sounded as much Italian as Indian: Swami Mazziniananda. With a background in quack medicine, he stumbled into the role of Buddhist leader and established himself through a series of made-up titles, invented rituals, and outlandish costumes.³

Mazziniananda was one of the most remarkable and absurd figures in the history of Buddhism in the West. He parlayed a dubious background into a career that lasted nearly three decades and included a significant and influential thirteen-year relationship with the Buddhist Mission of North America. Mazziniananda conducted hundreds of English language services throughout northern California, ordained scores of people as Buddhists, created liturgies that received national attention, compiled hymnals from Spiritualist and New Thought groups that shaped Jōdo Shinshū services in North America for decades, and had connections to some of the most prominent and important Buddhists of the time including Paul Carus (1852–1919) and Shaku Sōen 釈宗演 (1860–1919). Mazziniananda’s Buddhist career and his connections to the Buddhist Mission of North America show how central the occult was to early Euro-American converts to Buddhism and efforts by the Buddhist Mission to reach beyond the Japanese in America.

2. “Take Buddha As Their Idol.”

3. While having no single or fixed meaning, the term “quack” has typically denoted in varying degrees: false pretenses to medical skill, aggressive or ostentatious promotion, practitioners or remedies outside of the medical establishment, and those who were engaged in fraud. More than a pejorative, “quackery” would have been the term used in Mazziniananda’s time and is still used by organizations such as the Food and Drug Administration and the American Medical Association.

Death of a Salesman, Birth of a Swami

According to the fantastic and improbable accounts given over the years by Mazziniananda himself, he was born in 1827 in the Iranian city of Isfahan to a Parsi father and a mother who was a “full-blooded Bengalee born in Benares.”⁴ After his father’s death, Mazziniananda moved to India at the age of seven with his mother and was promptly put into a monastery at Lhasa where he studied at the feet of the Dalai Lama for almost two decades. After being ordained a Jain monk, Mazziniananda left monastic life in Tibet and was reunited with his mother in England who had married “a noted mathematician of Welsh extraction” named Morgan. On his mother’s advice, he perfected his English and then gained three or four degrees from the University of Oxford and European institutions of higher learning before returning to a contemplative monastic life in Lhasa. Mazziniananda claimed that he first arrived in America in 1893 to attend the World’s Parliament of Religions in Chicago as “Lord Abbot of the Golden Temple” and representative of “the Himalaya regions” alongside the “famous Jaina monk” Gandhi (who was in South Africa at that time), Swami Vivekananda, and “many other orientals.”⁵

Perhaps the only part of Mazziniananda’s claimed origins that holds up to scrutiny or logic is the year of his arrival.⁶ While there is no record of him appearing at the well-documented Parliament of 1893, he does appear in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania that summer as “Dr. Mazzini” alongside a British-born patent medicine salesman named William Henry Veno. Veno came to the United States in 1887 and established a business in Pittsburgh manufacturing “Veno’s Lightning Cough Cure,” a nostrum that contained glycerin, alcohol, chloroform, and resin.⁷ Veno promoted his products through tours and print advertisements that were bolstered by audacious claims of himself as a miraculous wonder-worker and his product as a remarkable cure that could

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4. “Life Sketch of the Very Reverend Swami Dr. Mazziniananda,” *Light of Dharma*, December 1907, pp. 14-15; Paul Carus, “A Buddhist Prelate of California,” *The Open Court*, February 1912, Volume 26, Number 2, pp. 65-70.
 5. “Life Sketch of the Very Reverend Svami Dr. Mazziniananda, Abbot of the Udana Karana Order of the Jain Sect of Buddhists,” *The Light of Dharma*, December 1907, p. 14.
 6. The near-constant observations by reporters of Mazziniananda’s British accent—at times referred to as Cockney—suggest a high likelihood that he was born and raised in England.
 7. Corley, T. A. B. “Veno, Sir William Henry (1866–1933), Patent Medicine Entrepreneur.” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Accessed on 20 April 2018. <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-93363>.

“break the back of death.”⁸ “Dr. Mazzini” assisted Veno and promoted his remedies to audiences, and was billed as a former junior staff surgeon in the Franco-German war and a polyglot capable of speaking eleven languages.⁹

Mazzini left Veno in 1894 to start a questionable medical practice of his own. He settled in the central Michigan town of Jackson and offered himself to the public as “E. Leo Di Mazzini” — a holder of four advanced degrees, a Fellow of the Theosophical Society, and a specialist in various chronic diseases.¹⁰ Mazzini would give consultations by mail and travel to nearby towns to see patients. In the summer of 1898, he married under the name “Dr. Etienne Saint Francisco Xaviere Leo di Mazzini,” and census records from 1900 show he and his wife living together in Battle Creek, Michigan, the epicenter of health reform. Mazzini was still active as a doctor as late as May 1902 when he wrote to the *Carolina Medical Journal* and told the profession of the “incalculable benefit” he found with “Celerina (a patent medicine made up of celery and cocaine) in conjunction with electricity.”¹¹ That was followed by a two-year period when Mazziniananda separated from his wife and stopped playing the role of doctor, only to appear in San Diego and work as a psychic reader, palmist, and masseur for a short time before moving to Los Angeles.¹²

According to a sworn affidavit given later, Dr. Mazzini arrived in Los Angeles in April of 1905 and established himself in the downtown Grand Pacific Hotel. After he had been in the city for about a month, Mazzini took the advice (and a small personal loan) from another resident and bought robes, candles, an image of the Buddha, and “other Pharanalia [sic] for personating a Buddhist priest” and ordered books by mail to get caught up in his new profession.¹³ The Grand Pacific Hotel was also home to Rahula, a self-proclaimed teacher of a Hindu “system of mental and spiritual development” and possessor of “all the mysteries of the Orient” who read fortunes for money and claimed to head an Asian religious order known as the “Udana Karana.”¹⁴ When Rahula suddenly disappeared in late May, Mazzini broke into his room and helped himself to the missing Hindu’s books and teaching materials.¹⁵ In only six weeks’

8. Display Ad, *Lebanon Daily News*, 24 June 1893, p. 1.

9. “An Interview With Veno (Display Ad),” *The Patriot* (Harrisburg, PA), 7 July 1893.

10. Classified Ad, *Jackson Citizen Patriot*, 25 July 1898, p. 8.

11. “Original Communication,” *Columbia Medical Journal*, May 1902, p. 222.

12. Classified Ad for “Dr Mazzini, Psychic Reader,” *San Diego Union*, 29 October 1904, p. 9.

13. Bessie Beatty, “Truth Makes Fake Mediums Squirm,” *Los Angeles Herald*, 18 November 1906, p. 5.

14. Classified Ad, *Los Angeles Herald*, 13 November 1904.

15. From affidavit quoted in Beatty, “Truth Makes Fake Mediums Squirm.”

time, when a reporter from the *Los Angeles Herald* came to the hotel to write a mocking story on Rahula's disappearance, Dr. Mazzini had adopted his predecessor's turbaned and berobed persona, assumed Rahula's temple housed within the hotel, and claimed the mantle of the Udana Karana Order under which he would ordain several dozen people as Buddhists.¹⁶

While it may seem like an abrupt shift, the early quack medicine career of Dr. Mazzini provided good training for Swami Mazziniananda's new role as Buddhist clergy. The historian James Harvey Young described the itinerant seller of patent medicine as "the first promoter to test out a multitude of psychological lures by which people might be enticed to buy his wares" (1961: 42), and Swami Mazziniananda doubtlessly used the techniques and skills he acquired during his time hawking the products of Veno and as a spurious doctor in Michigan, from using specious honorary titles and exaggerating his age to his abilities to charm a crowd and think on his feet. Mazziniananda's experiences with medicine shows, the variety of entertainments that were commonly used to draw a crowd and then entice them to buy patent medicines, also easily transferred to the elaborate religious services he would later carry out. Young's description of the medicine show as entertainment aided by "exotic costume" and centering on the "pontifical assurance... of a commanding figure in a tall hat and cutaway coat" (1961: 190) comes incredibly close to a description of Mazziniananda's Buddhist services.

The success of Mazziniananda in Los Angeles was only short-lived. One of his elderly converts was struck with paralysis while attempting the swami's "Buddhist breathing exercises" and Mazziniananda was then kicked out of the hall he held meetings in after failing to pay rent.¹⁷ Things became much worse in November 1906 when the *Los Angeles Herald* launched a massive muckraking campaign against spiritualists and fortune tellers in the city. While he claimed to be a Buddhist cleric, the bulk of Mazziniananda's activities were dedicated to making money from psychic readings and conducting spiritualist meetings and seances. The *Herald* made Mazziniananda their favorite target, and in a litany of articles about him published within a single year, they sent undercover reporters to his seances, exposed his "temple methods," mocked his public drunkenness as "communing with the spirits," and at one point referred to him as a "little rat-eyed faker."¹⁸ The enormous pressure put on

16. "Hindoo Prophet Goeth Hence: His Followers Seek Him Far and Wide, Their Money Taketh Wings," *Los Angeles Herald*, 16 July 1905.

17. "Hit By Wind of Swami," *Los Angeles Times*, 24 February 1906; "Swami Outfit Melts Away," *Los Angeles Times*, 27 February 1906.

18. "Mazziniananda Gets One Square Meal," *Los Angeles Herald*, 18 August 1907.

Mazziniananda led to him repeatedly being arrested, fined, jailed, and forced to appear in court. By the end of the following summer he had fled Los Angeles.



Mazziniananda with Rev. Kino Kaizō 紀開藏 at the Fresno Buddhist Church in 1909 (from the article "Gorgeous Celebrations Held in Oriental Quarter of Fresno" in the *Fresno Morning Republican* on May 2)

The Buddhist Mission of North America and Mazziniananda

Less than a month after his departure, Mazziniananda was already established in San Francisco thanks to connections he had made in Los Angeles a few years earlier, most likely with Uchida Kōyū 内田晁融 (1876–1960), the first minister of the Southern California Buddhist Church (founded 1905) and then fourth director of the Buddhist Mission of North America in San Francisco. In September of 1905, only a few months into his newfound career as a Buddhist cleric and a few months before

he initiated twenty followers into the Buddhist dharma and his Holy Brotherhood of the Udana Karana Order, Mazziniananda gave a speech and shared a stage with several Japanese Buddhist dignitaries at a large event in Turner Hall in downtown Los Angeles: Rinzai Rōshi Shaku Sōen, his student (and future popularizer of Zen and Shin Buddhism) Suzuki Daisetsu Teitarō 鈴木大拙貞太郎 (a.k.a. D.T. Suzuki, 1870–1966), the aforementioned Uchida, and Izumida Junjō 泉田準城 (1868–1951) of the Buddhist Mission of Los Angeles (and later the first bishop (*rimban*) of Higashi Honganji Los Angeles Betsuin).¹⁹ Sōen himself wrote about this event and claimed that “Rev. Uchida Kōyū and Mazziniananda made speeches in that hall with a big audience of one thousand people.”²⁰ The description of the event as “a grand treat for American believers and students of the higher life” and the presence of a trio of local spiritualists providing a “fine programme of oriental music” suggest that Mazziniananda was instrumental in its organization. Three days later, a smaller reception for Shaku Sōen was held at Mazziniananda’s Buddhist temple in the Grand Pacific hotel with an estimated 300 guests streaming in to bow “in true oriental style” to Shaku and receive his blessing.²¹

The Buddhist Mission of North America was one of the most important religious organizations for Japanese immigrants in the United States. Started by a pair of ministers sent to San Francisco in 1898 by the Nishi Hongwanji branch of Jōdo Shinshū, the main efforts of the BMNA revolved around conducting rituals, teaching Buddhism, and preserving Japanese language and culture among the largely bachelor Issei. Scholarly work holds that during the first decades of its existence, there was little propagation by the Buddhist Mission beyond the Japanese American community. Arthur Nishimura (2008: 99-100) cites the 1906 earthquake in San Francisco as a reason for the cessation of “Caucasian study classes, services, or group” activities. Thomas Tweed (2000) argues for a limited and mostly intellectual Victorian engagement with Buddhism that could be bookended by the year 1912. Tetsuden Kashima (1977: 80-81) claims that there were no non-Japanese ministers in the proto-Buddhist Churches of America until the 1930s, Kenneth Tanaka (1999: 6) claims that the Buddhist Mission “rarely carried out active propagation activities beyond the existing Japanese American communities,” and Michael Masatsugu (2008: 436-437) claims that Euro-American interest in and conversion to Buddhism only went beyond individuals and extended to a “critical mass” after the Second World War.

19. “Society Meetings,” *Los Angeles Times*, 17 September 1905; “Buddhist Temple for Los Angeles,” *Los Angeles Herald*, 18 September 1905.

20. See: Shaku Sōen, *Ōbei Unsuiki* (Kinkodo, 1907), pp. 44–45.

21. “Buddhists Give Reception,” *Los Angeles Herald*, 21 September 1905.

The Buddhist Mission of North America, however, made significant efforts to spread Buddhism to Euro-Americans on the West Coast in the years preceding the First World War, and the bulk of those efforts centered around Swami Mazziniananda. While staying tethered to the Buddhist Mission in San Francisco by periodically conducting services in English there, Mazziniananda also conducted services, gave sermons, and conducted ordinations in at least seven other Californian cities including Santa Cruz, Watsonville, Sacramento, Woodland, Stockton, Fresno, and Hanford.

In May 1908, Swami Mazziniananda brought his Udana Karana Order to a rented hall in Santa Cruz, where he gave lectures on Buddhism, while also teaching classes on yogic breathing and holding seances at his personal residence. Mazziniananda later dedicated a Buddhist Temple in the same hall with the assistance of three Japanese priests from the Buddhist Churches of Watsonville, Fresno, and Oakland. According to newspaper accounts, the ceremony was an elaborate affair with incense, candles, secret symbols, and the swami wore a turban and three robes of red, white, and purple.²² In 1911, Mazziniananda took up a brief residence as the “English preacher” and leader of “English Choral Services” at the Buddhist Church of Watsonville and then began a year-long stay with Rev. Kudō Edatsu 工藤慧達 (1878–1932) at the Buddhist Church of Sacramento. Mazziniananda conducted both regular and “solemn pontifical” services in English, and, as was his custom, he also conducted parallel work by giving lectures for a Spiritualist ministry at a rented hall in the city. In mid-1912, Mazziniananda spent a short while at the Buddhist church in Stockton, where he gave sermons in English and conducted “solemn vespers and benediction” services, and by the end of the year he was situated within the Buddhist Church of Fresno, where he did similar work.²³

During this peripatetic period of supporting the BMNA’s Buddhist churches, Mazziniananda was also building up his own institutions and profile. Articles of incorporation for the Udana Karana Order of Buddhists and Jain Philosophy were filed with the state of California in April 1911, and three months later Mazziniananda dedicated the “Seventh Temple” of this Order as he ordained three San Francisco residents as Buddhists in the transitional headquarters of the Buddhist Mission. The event was covered in newspapers around the country and described as “the first occasion in the history of Buddhism in the United States that native Americans of the white race have ever been raised to the priesthood.”²⁴

22. “Buddhist Temple Dedicated with Ritual and Program,” *Santa Cruz Surf*, 7 December 1908.

23. See Display Ads in the *Evening Mail* of Stockton for 18 and 25 May 1912 and 1 June 1912.

24. “Americans Made Buddhist Svamis,” *San Francisco Call*, 25 July 1911; “American Buddhist Priests,” *Syracuse Herald*, 25 July 1911.

Swami Mazziniananda also codified his Buddhist liturgies in the following year. Paul Carus, who been corresponding with Mazziniananda for about a year prior, published a biography of the “Buddhist Prelate of California” and his very Catholic-like “Order of the Buddhist High Mass” across twenty pages replete with photographs and musical notation in the February 1912 issue of his magazine, *The Open Court*. While Mazziniananda’s account of the liturgy being a faithful account of the services done in “Llhassa” [sic] strained credulity (and readers wrote into *The Open Court* to say as much), Carus himself seemed to have believed in Mazziniananda’s account, despite being a well-educated Buddhist sympathizer. In private correspondence Carus asked Mazziniananda if the swami could help him send letters to the Dalai Lama.²⁵ Later in 1912, Mazziniananda incorporated another entity while in Fresno—the Maha-Bodhi Society of Truth Seekers—and published a forty-four-page *Service Book and Hymn Book* that included a reprint of the Order of Buddhist High Mass, the Vesper Service and Benediction, thirty-eight hymns, the organization’s constitution and by-laws, and display advertisements from local Japanese American businesses and a Fresno optometrist who served as the president of the Society.

Mazziniananda claimed that he was born, ordained, and later, opened his Church of Universal Truth, all on the fourth of April, a date that could conveniently dovetail with the birthday of the historical Buddha. For over two decades, Mazziniananda made that time of year the occasion for elaborate events that celebrated the Buddha and himself (not necessarily in that order), hosted special guests, included ceremonies such as the “solemn pontifical high mass” and various ordinations, musical performances, and festivities such as banquets and receptions. (At the celebration of his claimed eighty-seventh birthday in 1912, Mazziniananda gave souvenirs of the event to those in attendance.) At the first of these events in 1910, there was a three-hour service in honor of the Buddha’s birth at the San Francisco temple that began with Mazziniananda reading a list of “felicitations... from potentates and savages of the East” that celebrated his own birth, not the Buddha’s, and culminated in his initiating an American into the priesthood.²⁶ Later, in 1915 and then 1920, there were additional “golden” and “diamond episcopal” jubilees that commemorated Mazziniananda joining the Buddhist clergy.

Between February and December 1915, San Francisco was the site of the Panama-Pacific International Exposition, a massive world’s fair that saw an estimated total of nineteen million visitors. Among the over 800 meetings and smaller congresses that were held in conjunction with the Exposition, the BMNA hosted a World Buddhist

25. Letter from Paul Carus to Swami Mazziniananda, dated 3 April 1911 (Open Court Publishing Company Records, 1886–1998, 1/2/MSS 027).

26. “Anniversary of Buddha Celebrated at S.F. Temple,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 8 April 1910.

Conference, which took place over a week in August with hundreds of attendees and delegates from Japan, India, Burma, Ceylon, Mexico, and Hawaii. Mazziniananda was the nominal president of the Conference, gave the welcoming speech, accepted a bronze medal presented to the Buddhists by the exposition, and was seated in the center of the front row of a photograph taken of the assembled delegates.²⁷ While Swami Mazziniananda continued in his role for the Buddhist Mission of North America over the next several years, he also continued in his roles outside of it. He lectured at the Divine Church of Spiritualism in 1918, and in 1919 was made a director of the First Psycho Science Church in Oakland and incorporated his own Church of Universal Truth.²⁸

In the spring and summer of 1920, Mazziniananda made two separate visits to the town of Guadalupe on the central California coast: the first in late April for a festival to commemorate the *parinirvana* of the Buddha held by the local Japanese Buddhist Association and the second visit in July for the tenth anniversary of the Guadalupe Buddhist Church. On both occasions, Mazziniananda gave himself top billing above other Buddhist officials in the promotion, granted himself the titles of “His Holiness” and “Lord High Priest of L’Hassa Thibet” and put his name in bold type.²⁹ On the second visit Mazziniananda held services at the local Buddhist church, but also gave lectures on telepathy and yogic breathing for money at other local venues and gave his title to local reporters as “pastor of the Church of Universal Truth in Oakland.”³⁰

Shortly after his pastoral visit to the Central Coast, Mazziniananda ordained Harvey Spencer Lewis (1883–1939), founder of the American Rosicrucian group known as the Ancient and Mystical Order Rosae Crucis (AMORC), as a Buddhist priest in a small ceremony in front of twenty people inside the Buddhist Church of San Francisco. As “Dr. H.L.S. Sobhita,” Lewis would assist Mazziniananda in his services and occasionally give sermons, but he only went public with this ordination after the death of Mazziniananda, and the biography of Lewis published by his son decades later refers to his ordination by Mazziniananda as an honorary degree that Lewis begrudgingly accepted out of politeness.³¹

27. “Buddhist Priests to Get Exposition Medal,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 1 August 1915.

28. Classified Ad, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 30 March 1918; “Officers Named by Psycho Scientists,” *Oakland Tribune*, 10 February 1919.

29. Display Ad, *Santa Maria Times*, 30 April 1920; Display Ad, *Santa Maria Times*, 20 July 1920.

30. “Buddhist Priest Will Lecture Here,” *Santa Maria Times*, 26 July 1920; “Buddhist Priest Will Speak Again Tonight,” *Santa Maria Times*, 30 July 1920; and “Buddhist Priest Ends Lectures Here,” *Santa Maria Times*, 4 August 1920.

31. “Important Rosicrucian Documents, No. 2,” *Rosicrucian Digest*, vol. 11 No. 8 (September 1933); Lewis, Ralph M., *Cosmic Mission Fulfilled* (San Jose: Supreme Grand Lodge of AMORC, Inc., 1966), pp. 185–188.

The Separation of the Buddhist Mission of North America from Mazziniananda

Soon after the ordination of Lewis, the thirteen-year relationship between Mazziniananda and the Japanese American Buddhist establishment was dissolved and the swami gave his farewell sermon at the Buddhist Church of San Francisco on October 17, 1920.³² Although there is no clear evidence as to why this separation occurred, it is possible that the split was instigated by personal animus towards Mazziniananda from a rival within the Buddhist Mission named Mortimer T. Kirby (1877–Unknown). The British-born Kirby travelled to Japan in 1913 after he developed an interest in Buddhism, and there he joined the Sanmaji Kai 三摩地会 or the Society for Samadhi and then took Rinzai Zen monastic vows and the name Shaku Sōgaku 釈宗覚 at Engakuji under Shaku Sōen (Yoshinaga 2013). For a short while Kirby tried to propagate Buddhism by himself in Canada and then went to San Francisco around early 1920.

According to an acerbic article written for *The Young East* in 1927, Kirby claimed that his first exposure to “Buddhism Among Americans” was with Mazziniananda and the “hocus-pocus” of his “Pontifical High Mass,” which he found ridiculous and counterproductive to the spread of true Dharma. Kirby wrote in *The Young East* that he conducted a “private inquiry and much correspondence” and brought his findings to Bishop Uchida who then ousted Mazziniananda and put Kirby in as his replacement. There is evidence that Kirby did carry out an investigation of Mazziniananda and was thorough enough to uncover the swami’s past as a fraudulent medical doctor in Jackson, Michigan, twenty-five years earlier.³³ Six months before Mazziniananda was ousted, Kirby was appointed by Uchida as “Sogaku Shaku, the Lord High Priest over the English-speaking Section of our Buddhist Religion,” the only such person “recognized by us who are at this present time the only legal representatives of Buddhism in the Americas.”³⁴

There were also larger political reasons for the Buddhist Mission to distance itself from Mazziniananda. Only a few months earlier, in July 1920, California’s U.S. Senator and former mayor of San Francisco James Duval Phelan (1861–1930) testified in a series of congressional hearings held in California about Japanese immigration. Consistent with his long-standing attacks on immigrants from Asia and foreshadowing

32. “News of Churches,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 16 October 1920.

33. See: “What Lazy Man Died in 1895?: Buddhist Priest Asks Odd Question in Letter to Chief Hudson.” *Jackson News*, 29 August 1920, p. 1.

34. Appointment of M.T. Kirby dated 3 April 1920. (BCA from JANM Box No. 1.01.01, Folder 1920).

many of the claims that would justify the internment of tens of thousands of Japanese Americans decades later during the Second World War, Phelan claimed that there were seventy-six Buddhist temples in California dedicated to Shintoism and worship of the emperor and that these sites kept their members dangerously loyal to Japan, not America. "The dangers of Japanese immigration," said Phelan to the committee, was that "they carry with them their temples and idols and superstitions" (United States Congressional Committee on Immigration and Naturalization 1921: 21).

Some of the statements made by Phelan during the proceedings were reprinted in the *San Francisco Examiner*, including one in which he described Buddhist temples as "penetration of our State by that non-moral people whose hovels... appear everywhere to take the place of our Western civilization."³⁵ Reverend Uchida wrote a response to Phelan's charges and it was also included in the proceedings. In it, Uchida stressed the democratic nature of Buddhism and denied the accusation of emperor-worship in the Buddhist churches, stating that they had "nothing to do whatsoever with Shintoism, politics, or any imperialistic policy formulated by the Japanese Government" (United States Congressional Committee on Immigration and Naturalization 1921: 576). Uchida corrected Phelan's overestimation by noting that there were only twenty-five Buddhist churches, and then went into detail describing them as part of a highly organized and regulated religious body that operated under the management of the Buddhist Mission of North America with clergy that were properly authorized and ordained.

Mazziniananda's freewheeling actions undercut Uchida's claims of a singular and well-ordered Buddhist body. While participating in the Buddhist Mission, Mazziniananda kept his own parallel organizations in the Udana Karana Order of Buddhists and the Church of Universal Truth, held a role as director of the First Church of Psycho-Science, and gave guest lectures for groups such as the Divine Church of Spiritualism. The frequent ordinations that Mazziniananda also conducted both within and beyond the Buddhist Mission, and his unchecked and extravagant use of honorary titles for himself and others, all made it more difficult for the Buddhist Mission to be seen by the public as a transparent and legitimate representative for Buddhists in the country. In light of Phelan's attacks, many of Mazziniananda's previous public statements also ran the risk of being used as incriminating evidence against Japanese Buddhists in America: Mazziniananda portrayed Christianity as "the stupid dogma of hell and damnation," vastly overestimated the number of Buddhists in the country, and claimed that Buddhism was a rapidly growing faith among Americans.

35. "Immigrants Peril State, Says Phelan," *San Francisco Examiner*, 13 July 1920, pp.1 and 3.

In October of 1920, a few months after the Congressional hearings and a few days after the Buddhist Mission severed its ties with Mazziniananda, Phelan spoke out in favor of an amendment to the California state constitution that would further restrict Japanese farmers from owning land or holding long-term leases. In his appeal to voters, Phelan put Buddhism front and center and claimed that with an alleged eighty-four temples, "Japan has colonized our Pacific Coast, California... with her people, customs, and religion."³⁶ Rev. Uchida seems to have made efforts during this period of intense scrutiny through the summer and early-autumn of 1920 to shore up the English section of the Buddhist Mission by ordaining (and in some cases re-ordaining) American converts and carefully denoting their title, role, territory, and the expanse and limits of their authority under the Buddhist Mission.³⁷ Severing ties with Mazziniananda would seem to be a natural culmination of these efforts.

Another liability could have been found in the earlier connections between Mazziniananda and the Ghadar Party, a group of South Asian revolutionaries on the American West Coast who sought to overthrow British colonial rule in India. At the dawn of the First World War, they found common cause with a German government that was eager to supply money and arms to a group who would foment insurrection in India and hamper the British war effort. The conspiracy was thwarted by British Intelligence and in the spring of 1917 there was a wave of arrests across the United States on federal charges of conspiracy that led to the five-month long Hindu-German Conspiracy Trial in San Francisco, that was, up to that point, the longest and most expensive trial in American history. Among the first people arrested in San Francisco were Solon Leonhauser and his wife Maria, high ranking members of Mazziniananda's Udana Karana Order. Headlines referred to Solon Leonhauser as an "old Buddhist priest" and he was quoted following his arrest as saying, "My wife and myself are philosophers. We are followers of Buddha. We love the religion of the Hindu and in that way they have become our friends... Their religion is ours. We are Buddhists."³⁸ Solon was one of three men ordained into the Udana Karana Order of Buddhists as "Devadathat Svami" by Mazziniananda six years earlier, and he and Maria were

36. "Phelan Makes New Plea to Bar Out Japs," *San Francisco Examiner*, 20 October 1920.

37. M.T. Kirby was made "Lord High Priest over the English-speaking Section" in April, Robert and Alice Clark were appointed "to the full charge of the American Buddhist Organizations" in the Bay Area in June, and then the Clarks were ordained again "into the Priesthood of our Shin Sect" in September. See: Buddhist Churches of American Collection at the Japanese American National Museum (Ordination Box No. 1.01.01, Folder 1920).

38. "Old Buddhist Priest Held As Plot Head," *San Francisco Examiner*, 11 July 1917.

respectively listed as president and vice-president in the Udana Karana Order's articles of incorporation.³⁹

In court, the Leonhausers were accused of serving as intermediaries between the Indian revolutionaries and the German agents, specifically hosting a formal dinner at their house that was attended by Ram Chandra, president of the Ghadar Party, and the German Imperial Consul General Franz Bopp.⁴⁰ Testimony during the trial revealed that Maria Leonhauser played a central role in overthrowing Ram Chandra, the Ghadar Party's leader from 1914 to 1917, by forwarding charges of corruption against him to the exiled leader Har Dyal, which eventually led to Ram Chandra's resignation and a contentious division among the revolutionaries in America.⁴¹ The trial reached a dramatic conclusion on its last day when Ram Chandra was shot dead in the middle of the courtroom by another defendant, who was then killed by a United States Marshall. Less than a week later, in late-April 1918, Mazziniananda held a "solemn pontifical requiem" for Ram Chandra at the Buddhist Church on Pine Street and gave a sermon with the theme "There Is No Death" to a modest crowd of less than two dozen people that included the widow and two children of Ram Chandra.⁴²

Through his ordinations and rituals, Swami Mazziniananda had repeatedly connected the Buddhist Mission to the center of an international conspiracy, and these connections would have aged poorly. During the two-and-a-half years between the events surrounding the Hindu-German Conspiracy trial and the Buddhist Mission's break with Mazziniananda, the United States had moved into the midst of the First Red Scare, a period of widespread fear of foreign radicals punctuated by general strikes, anarchist bombings, and a government crackdown led by Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer. While the Ghadar Party had some public support at the time of the trial, an association with them would have been seen in a dramatically worse light in 1920 with the shifting context of the First Red Scare and a growing view of Ghadar as a terrorist organization of foreign radicals (Coulson 2017: 56-60). With the connections to Ghadar, along with the internal pressures of M.T. Kirby and the external anti-Japanese pressures of Phelan, there were plenty of reasons for the Buddhist Mission to cut ties with Mazziniananda.

39. "Americans Made Buddhist Swamis," *San Francisco Call*, 25 July 1911; and *ibid.*

40. "Old Buddhist Priest Held As Plot Head," *San Francisco Examiner*, 11 July 1917.

41. "Ram Chandra Exposed by Aged Woman," *San Francisco Examiner*, 10 January 1918.

42. "Buddhist Church Holds Requiem for Ram Chandra." *San Francisco Chronicle*, 29 April 1918.

The Later Incarnations of Swami Mazziniananda

The split with the Buddhist Mission of North America had little effect on Mazziniananda's operations. After only two weeks, he established a new institution about a mile away from the Japanese Buddhist Church that was alternately referred to as the American Buddhist Church of the Dharma and the Buddhist Cathedral of San Francisco, and Mazziniananda continued to hold Sunday services as he did before. His Church of Universal Truth kept running in Oakland, and in the beginning of 1923, he incorporated yet another organization, the American Great White Lodge of the Great White Brotherhood. During this time, the Church of Universal Truth also hosted and sponsored a range of figures in the metaphysical world with Mazziniananda often playing the role of a formative influence. One of the most important of these was Edwin John Dingle (1881–1972), the founder of Mentalphysics who, despite being described as living in retreat in Oakland until 1927, was the president of the Church of Universal Truth for over a year starting in 1926 and would later date his career in “ministry” to this time.⁴³

Starting in 1925, many South Asian yoga teachers who started touring the country to give public lectures and lead private classes in various cities made Oakland a stop on their itineraries (Deslippe 2018). “Maneck of India” lectured on divine healing under the auspices of the Church of Universal Truth at the Leamington Hotel in 1929 and Sant Ram Mandal similarly addressed the women of Oakland's Ebell Club on “Rosicrucian and Masonic Symbols” in 1931.⁴⁴ Yogi Wassan made at least seven stops in Oakland under the Church of Universal Truth on his cross-country travels between 1929 and 1934, and Hari Mohan Singh, a pioneering aviator who remade himself into “Yogi Hari Rama” and went across the United States in one massively-successful, three-year tour, seems to have settled on his flamboyant persona after being hosted by Mazziniananda early on in his yogic career (Deslippe 2019).

The birthday observances that Mazziniananda held annually, beginning in 1910, helped to strengthen his questionable claims to be the oldest ordained Buddhist in the world and also gave him considerable free publicity. On multiple occasions, newspapers ran stories about the aged Buddhist and his fantastic past, and for his part Mazziniananda was always able to provide an interesting angle and memorable quote

43. “Dingle Heads Church of Universal Truth,” *Oakland Tribune*, 21 August 1926; “Founder Will Outline Mentalphysics Growth,” *Los Angeles Times*, 4 November 1961, p. 16.

44. Display Ad, *Oakland Tribune*, 20 April 1929 and “Dr. Mandal of India to Speak,” *Oakland Tribune*, 10 June 1931.

for reporters. In 1923, Mazziniananda thumbed his nose at Prohibition and expressed hope that he could “paint the town red” and drink on the occasion of his upcoming centennial birthday.⁴⁵ In 1930, he wistfully told the Associated Press in a story that was syndicated nationwide that he was probably “too Westernized” to return to the Lhasa monasteries of his youth, and looked to the long life ahead of him by saying, “I’m not good enough to go to heaven, and I’m not bad enough to go to hell, so I guess I’m destined to spend a good many more years on this earth.”⁴⁶ The Buddhist bishop was in newspapers across the country again in July of 1930 after the death of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the British author and creator of the character of Sherlock Holmes. Doyle was an ardent spiritualist, and after his passing, psychics and mediums on both sides of the Atlantic, including Mazziniananda, gained publicity by attempting to establish contact with him. Mazziniananda claimed that Doyle was a friend of his in life, but the claim is hard to substantiate.⁴⁷

Despite the publicity, this was doubtlessly a period of decline. The Church of Universal Truth lost their home of nearly a decade— rented space in a building for the fraternal organization known as the Knights of Pythias— at the end of 1928 and spent the next few years moving from one location in Oakland to another, often with large periods of time between when no services were held. Underneath his public claims of vigor and youthfulness as the world’s oldest Buddhist priest, Mazziniananda was in declining health and other members of the Church of Universal Church increasingly gave lectures and led services in his place. Mazziniananda nearly died from a bout of pneumonia in 1927, and a portrait of him published in 1930 shows him with cataracts in his right eye and a mouth sunken in from several lost teeth.⁴⁸

On December 9, 1931, two months after he told a reporter for the *Oakland Tribune* about his “recipe for longevity” for an article subtitled “Hale at 106,” Swami

45. “Bishop Will Paint Town Red at 100; Dry Law’s Wake,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, 17 April 1923, p. 33; “Buddhist Bishop Sees Finish for Prohibition Law,” *San Francisco Examiner*, 6 April 1923, p. 6.

46. “Bishop Observes 106th Birthday,” *Evening Independent* (Massillon, Ohio), 5 April 1930; “U.S. Buddhist Bishop 105,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 5 April 1930, p. 12.

47. The two could have met when Doyle toured the United States in 1923 and gave lectures on psychic phenomena in San Francisco and Oakland. As his travel memoirs attest, Doyle made a point to visit mediums and spiritualists such as Mazziniananda at every turn while in America, but there is no mention of the Buddhist bishop in those accounts, and perhaps more importantly, Mazziniananda never made claims to knowing Doyle while Doyle was alive and able to deny his claims while still on the earth.

48. “A Message From A. Conan Doyle,” *Mystic Magazine*, November 1930, p. 28.

Mazziniananda was found dead in his apartment.⁴⁹ He left behind no estate and would have been unceremoniously buried in a potter's field if it was not for a last minute phone call from a charitable member of the Church of Universal Truth.⁵⁰ In an ironically fitting tribute to his life, the *Los Angeles Times* and the *New York Times* dutifully reported Mazziniananda's myths about himself as facts in their obituaries as they described him as a centenarian Buddhist bishop who was friends with the late Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.⁵¹



Portrait of Mazziniananda in 1916 (from the self-published poetry chapbook *Thoughts*)

Bhikkhus Vagantes and Hakujiin Hymns

Few traces of Mazziniananda survived in the records of and histories created by the Buddhist Churches of America (as the Buddhist Mission became known in 1942), and as a result there is hardly any mention of him within secondary histories and scholarly

49. Nancy Barr Mavity, "Aged Priest Tells How To Live Long," *Oakland Tribune*, 2 October 1931, p. 20.

50. "San Jose Man Saves Bishop From Potter's Field," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 11 December 1931.

51. "American Buddhist Bishop Found Dead," *Los Angeles Times*, 9 December 1931; "Dr. Mazziniananda Dies at 106," *New York Times*, 10 December 1931.

works on Buddhism in the United States. One possible reason for this exclusion was Mazziniananda's behavior and reputation. As with M.T. Kirby, many within the Buddhist Mission may have seen Mazziniananda as embarrassment who was best forgotten. Another is that Swami Mazziniananda came to Northern California with his own dubious credentials and was never officially ordained a minister through the American Jōdo Shinshū establishment, and so would not have been included on any official rolls. There was also the confusion created by Mazziniananda's elaborate backstory, his lengthy and unusual name, and the numerous titles that were added and subtracted to it, particularly when references to Mazziniananda moved back and forth in translation between English and Japanese. There are records of Mazziniananda that name him as "Swami Mazziniananda" in Watsonville, "Dr. Swami Mavviniamanea" in Fresno, and as both "Dr. Madhinanda" and an unnamed "Buddhist Missionary from India" in Sacramento.⁵²

The details about the life and activities of Swami Mazziniananda make it difficult to place him within distinct and exclusive categories or easily situate him within a larger history of Buddhism in America. In this sense, he could be compared to other figures such as Sufi Abdul Hamid and Ida Craddock, whose beliefs and practices were a complicated metaphysical mixture, but were still placed by scholars respectively within the larger histories of African American engagement with Buddhism and yoga in the United States, despite having only tentative links to those traditions (McNicholl 2018; Jain 2015: 22-29, 133). Mazziniananda could be seen as having two parallel careers as an occultist and Buddhist, at times moving back and forth between them. Most often he existed simultaneously within both of them. The most glaring example of this occurred in Sacramento when listings for him at the Spiritualist Mission and Buddhist Church ran side-by-side in the local newspaper.⁵³ An exposé published in 1915 described Mazziniananda's work in Los Angeles as "a great mixture of 'fake' Buddhism, Roman Catholicism, and modern spiritualism" and Mazziniananda as a "medium (who) wore the costume of a Buddhist priest."⁵⁴ It was a description that was as accurate as it was pejorative.

Several scholars have described nuances within modern Buddhism by employing forms of Christianity as points of explanatory comparison. Gananath Obeyesekere (1970) famously used "Protestant Buddhism" to describe a moment in nineteenth-

52. "The Svami Spoke," *Evening Pajaronian* (Watsonville), 06 February 1911; "Elaborate Ceremonies To Mark Buddha's Birthday," *Fresno Morning Republican*, 2 April 1910; and *Buddhist Churches of America: Volume 1, 75 Year History 1899–1974*. Chicago: Nobart, p. 150.

53. See: "Church Listings" in *Sacramento Bee*, 6 May 1911.

54. David P. Abbott, "Some Famous Exposures," in *The Lock and Key Library* (New York: The Review of Reviews, 1915), p. 83.

century Sri Lankan history where the “norms and organizational forms” of modern, urban, elite Buddhists reformers were often derived from Protestant Christianity, and could also be seen as being “Protestant” in spirit with Buddhists protesting against Christianity similarly to how Christians protested the Catholic Church during the Protestant Reformation. Stephen Prothero (1995) built upon the same term to describe the Buddhism of Henry Steel Olcott as “a complex creolization of traditional Theravada Buddhism, Protestant modernism, metropolitan gentility, and academic Orientalism.” I have argued that the Venerable Lokanatha (né Salvatore Cioffi), an Italian-born immigrant to America who converted to Buddhism in the 1920s and became a global missionary and reformer, could be considered as something like a Catholic Buddhist (Deslippe 2013: 178), since, unlike Olcott, he embraced austerities, monasticism, popular traditions, and devotional practices from various cultures in ways suggesting a continued influence from the Catholic worldviews of his childhood, despite his sincere devotion to Buddhism and his sharp renunciation of the Church as “the Religion of Dictatorship.”⁵⁵

If there is a similar category through which we could understand Swami Mazziniananda, I suggest that it is as a Buddhist “wandering bishop.” In the Western Christian tradition, wandering bishops or *episcopi vagantes* have been those who exist outside established churches or dioceses, even excommunicated, but still can administer sacraments and maintain valid orders of consecration, and thus be able to continue apostolic succession. While existing prior to the Middle Ages, the number of wandering bishops increasing dramatically with the Anglo-Catholic movement and Occult Revival of the nineteenth century. David Barrett has described modern wandering bishops as those “who collect several different lines of transmission of apostolic succession, and who will happily (and sometimes for a fee) consecrate anyone who requests it” (2006: 301). Peter Levenda (2005) has contended that ordination through wandering bishops is an expeditious, if unscrupulous, way of becoming credentialed as the head of one’s own small spiritual kingdom without the inconveniences of belief, training, or the cure of souls; it can be seen as a form of extended ecclesiastical role-playing, with all of their various titles, ornate rituals, and organizational forms not being means to an end, but ends in themselves.

Rather than collecting titles from others, Mazziniananda simply created and adopted a dizzying array of his own religious, learned, and esoteric credentials: Venerable, Right Reverend, Bishop, Sri, Swami, Yogi, Lord Abbot, High Priest, Pastor, Monk, Maha Thero, His Holiness, Grand Hierophant, Master of Arts,

55. Letter from the Venerable Lokanatha to Alexander Cioffi, dated 10 September 1948 (courtesy of Alexander Cioffi Jr.).

Doctor of Literature, Doctor of Philosophy, Doctor of Science, Medical Doctor, Sir, Thirty-third Degree Mason, Fellow of the Theosophical Society, and member of the chivalric Order of Saint John; all in addition to being knighted in Egypt, and a veteran of both the Sepoy Mutiny and Crimean War. He was just as prolific in the creation and incorporation of his own organizations: the original Udana Karana Order in 1905 (with a “Black Chapter” for select members who would hold séances in a completely darkened room on certain nights), the Raja Yoga School of Udana Karana Order of Buddhists in 1907, the auxiliary Swastika Society in 1908, the Udana Karana Order of Buddhists and Jain Philosophy in 1911, the Maha-Bodhi Society of Truth Seekers in 1912, the Church of Universal Truth in 1919, and the American Great White Lodge of the Great White Brotherhood in 1923.

The titles that Mazziniananda gave himself, the organizations that he created, and perhaps most importantly, his association with the Buddhist Mission to North America for over a decade, all created a backdrop of legitimacy that allowed Mazziniananda to steadily dispense with titles and conduct ordinations for others with some perceived measure of authority. There were the original twenty-seven Angelenos who “took Buddha as their idol” in their initiation into the Udana Karana order in 1905; Henry Locke who was inducted into the Buddhist priesthood in 1910; the three men (including Solon Leonhauser) “made Buddhist swamis” in San Francisco in 1911; the ordination of a hypnotist named Harold Powers (who was also his alleged great-grandson) in Sacramento in 1912; a “solemn ordination service” provided over by Mazziniananda at the Buddhist Church of San Francisco in 1918; the ordination of H. Spencer Lewis in 1920; an “installation into the Great White Lodge” and “investiture of robes” in Oakland in 1922; a “solemn initiation into the Great White Lodge” (preceded by a performance of Professor Lipka the “world renowned magician”) and “initiation of neophytes” that both occurred in 1923; and finally, the initiation of twenty-eight candidates into the Great White Lodge and the “Consecration to office of Sanyassin [sic]” of one Melvin Duncan in 1924.⁵⁶

Seen as a type of Buddhist wandering bishop, the ordination of H. Spencer Lewis of the AMORC in 1920 would be the emblematic moment of Mazziniananda’s

56. “Take Buddha As Their Idol: Sawtelle Proselytes Pin Faith To Hindu God,” *Los Angeles Times*, 20 October 1905; “Anniversary of Buddha Celebrated at S.F. Temple,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 8 April 1910; “American Made Buddhist Svamis,” *San Francisco Call*, 25 July 1911; “Buddhist Priest is Ordained Here,” *Sacramento Bee*, 22 April 1912; Classified Ad, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 6 April 1918; Display Ad, *Oakland Tribune*, 1 April 1922; Display Ad, *Oakland Tribune* 31 March 1923; “Death is Subject,” *Oakland Tribune*, 20 October 1923; Display Ad, *Oakland Tribune*, 5 April 1924.

career: one dubious but efficacious set of credentials used to create another and done within a modestly-sized but overly-embellished ordination service. More importantly, the constant churning of organizations and titles into revenue may have been Mazziniananda's ultimate purpose. The official articles of incorporation for the Udana Karana order in 1911 and the Church of Universal Truth in 1919 both state the granting of diplomas and the empowering of ministers as among the purposes of their formation, and, doubtlessly, those who received investiture through Mazziniananda made considerable investments of money to him for services, ritual dress, and certificates. There are indications that membership in Mazziniananda's organizations (outside of the Buddhist Mission) included monthly dues, and display advertisements constantly allude to him offering private courses of instruction and individual services that were likely paid.

The phrase most commonly associated with wandering bishops is the description of the rites they administer as being "valid, but illicit." Perhaps the most apt description of Swami Mazziniananda's place within the history of Japanese Buddhism in the United States is that he was illicit, but valid. Seeing Mazziniananda as a type of wandering bishop allows an understanding of him that goes beyond questions of legitimacy and institutional affiliation, and instead focuses on what he did. During the opening session of the 1915 Buddhist Congress, the acting secretary, Ernest E. Powers, resigned over his objections to Mazziniananda and told the *San Francisco Chronicle*, "[Mazziniananda] professes to be the head of the Buddhist Church in America, but the Japanese Buddhists do not recognize him. He is permitted to speak in the Japanese church here because of his admitted excellence as a pulpit orator."⁵⁷ To be allowed to speak within an institution is a very real form of recognition, however, and despite not holding an official title, Mazziniananda was allowed to represent the Buddhist Mission time and again through his sanctioned presence.

Mazziniananda's strongest and most long-lasting influence on the Buddhist Churches of America (as the Buddhist Mission was known after internment and the Second World War) may have been through liturgy and music. Most accounts of Japanese Buddhism in America point to the 1924 publication of *The Vade Macum: For Use in Buddhist Temples*, a collection of hymns and ceremonies created by three white converts Dorothy Hunt, Ernest Hunt, and A. Raymond Zorn, as a significant moment in the history of Japanese Buddhism in the United States as the earliest service book and collection of *gathas* in English (Wells 2002: 88; Tweed 2012: 36; Mitchell 2014: 363; Williams 2019: 323n14) or as a marker of the production of

57. "Officer Resigns at Buddhist Congress," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 3 August 1915.

English language *gathas* occurring both in Japan and North America (Mitchell 2006: 141). George Tanabe described the *Vade Macum* as “the primary if not the only handbook for English hymns and services” between 1924 and 1939, and its influence as being so strong and long-lasting that he saw “the international ideal of Ernest and Dorothy Hunt” and “the religion of the *Vade Macum*” present despite an emphasis on Japanization and Shinshū-specific teaching over the subsequent decades (Tanabe 1998: 223, 236). But with publication of Mazziniananda’s Buddhist High Mass in *The Open Court* and his *Service Book and Hymn Book of the Maha-Bodhi Society of Truth Seekers* published in 1913 when he was settled in Fresno, and the ability to connect the titles and lyrics of specific hymns across time, it is possible to reposition Mazziniananda as a more accurate creator of the earliest service book and collection of *gathas* in English, and trace his influence, through M.T. Kirby, to the Hunts and their *Vade Macum*.

Kirby was much closer to, and more strongly influenced by, Mazziniananda than his efforts to get him removed from the Buddhist Mission and his acerbic writings for *The Young East* in 1927 would suggest. Advertisements in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the *San Francisco Examiner*, and the *Oakland Tribune* show that Kirby regularly assisted Mazziniananda in his services from April to August of 1920, and Kirby carried on as Mazziniananda’s successor by holding weekly services in much the same manner in San Francisco, before leaving for Honolulu to propagate Buddhism and conduct English-language services at the invitation of Bishop Imamura Yemyō 今村恵猛 (1867–1932), the bishop of the Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii. The move to Hawaii did not seem to change much. Two newspaper articles provide a detailed look at the English language services Kirby conducted in Hawaii, one by Albert W. Palmer, the pastor at Honolulu’s prestigious Central Union Church, who visited the English service at the Hongwanji Temple in 1921 soon after Kirby arrived in Hawaii, and another three years later for the *Honolulu Advertiser*.⁵⁸ Both describe services that closely resemble the high pontifical masses of Mazziniananda, including hymns identical to those in the 1913 hymnal of the Maha-Bodhi Society of Truth Seekers: “Lead Kindly Light,” “Fellowship” (sung to the tune of “Blest Be the Tie That Binds”), “Joy to the World,” and “Hymn to Buddha.”⁵⁹

Historians have described Kirby as ill-suited for his task in Hawaii and his stay there as a disastrous period of unnecessary and harmful antagonism towards

58. Albert W. Palmer, “American Buddhist Ceremony,” *The Friend* (Honolulu), January 1922, Vol. 41, No. 1, 1, 4, and 15; and “Former English Churchman Is Now Head of Buddhist Mission Work in Honolulu,” *Honolulu Advertiser, Sunday Morning*, 2 March 1924, 10.

59. The final hymn was also published at the end of Mazziniananda’s article “Personality” for the December 1907 issue of *Light of Dharma*.

Christianity that was left to Dorothy and Ernest Hunt to make right (Hunter 1971: 132-134, 151-154; Tamura 1994: 205, Tanabe 2005: 89; Ama 2011: 70-71). But as much as the Hunts were a corrective to Kirby, there is also evidence that, in their creation of the *Vade Macum*, they too were influenced by Mazziniananda. At least six of the hymns published in the *Vade Macum* of 1924 had been published a decade earlier in Mazziniananda's *Maha-Bodhi Society of Truth Seekers* hymnal: "Coronation," "God Within," "Infinite Love and Wisdom," "Rejoice," "The Doctrine," and "There is No Death." In turn, the considerable influence of the *Vade Macum* extended the lifespan of the unacknowledged selections from Mazziniananda's hymnal and further entrenched them into Jōdo Shinshū ritual life. Five of the hymns from the *Maha-Bodhi Society of Truth Seekers* hymnal of 1913 were included in the 1932 edition of the *Vade Macum*, and the sixth hymn, "Infinite Love and Wisdom," while not included in the 1932 edition, had even greater longevity as it was included in at least five other collections over the next four decades.⁶⁰

Although scholars have noted that it was "clearly modeled after Christian service books" (Wells 2010: 179) and "reflected the themes of popular Protestant Christian hymns" (Stowe 2004: 158), the preface to the first edition of the *Vade Macum* reassured readers that "all the ceremonies and hymns have Buddhist Authors and are founded on the Dharma." But several of the hymns that moved from Mazziniananda's hymnal to the *Vade Macum* had unique, earlier origins that were not Buddhist, but metaphysical, despite misleading claims in the *Vade Macum* that they were authored by Paul Carus or were "ancient chants." "Infinite Love and Wisdom" was sung in meetings of the New Thought group the Unity School of Christianity at the turn of the century, and "There Is No Death," "God Within," and "Coronation" were all sung by Spiritualist groups during the nineteenth century with the latter in use before the American Civil War.⁶¹ "Rejoice," another hymn included in both the *Vade Macum* and Mazziniananda's service book, also reveals a likely source of the Spiritualist hymns

60. See: *Standard Buddhist Gathas and Ceremonies: Japanese and English* (Kyoto: Publication Bureau of Buddhist Books, 1939); *Buddhist Gathas and Ceremonies* (Los Angeles, 1943); the *Young Buddhist Companion* (1954); *Praises of the Buddha* (Honolulu, Revised 3rd edition, 1962); and the *Buddhist Service Book* (Buddhist Churches of America, San Francisco, 2nd Printing, 1967).

61. See: "Truth Students of Chicago," *Unity* vol. 19, no. 1 July 1903, p. 39; *The Spirit Minstrel: A Collection of Hymns and Music for the Use of Spiritualists in Their Circles and Public Meetings* (Boston: Bela Marsh, 1860), p. 21; *The Spiritual Harp: A Collection of Vocal Music for the Choir, Congregation, and Social Circle* (Boston: Banner of Light Publishing, 1868); and *The Spiritual Lyre: A Collection of Songs for the Use of Spiritualists* (London: J. Burns Progressive Library, 1870), Hymn #42.

used by Mazziniananda: the group of Euro-American converts to Buddhism that preceded him.

Thomas Tweed made an undated pamphlet of “Rejoice” the centerpiece of an article for *The Eastern Buddhist* and speculated that it was “printed and used between 1900... and 1907” and was used by the group of early Euro-American converts known as the Dharma Sangha of Buddha (Tweed 2012: 37). While not referenced in his article, the connection between the hymns of the Dharma Sangha of Buddha and those of the *Vade Macum* is made clear in an article published by the *San Francisco Examiner* in April 1902 about a service held at the Buddhist Mission on Polk Street in honor of the Buddha’s birthday. Just as Albert Palmer would do nearly two decades later in Hawaii, the writer for the *Examiner* preserved a brief, but detailed account of the service that included mention of a hymn sung “in the sweet melody of ‘Ye Banks and Braes’” that included the line “let the whole earth with joy resound,” exactly the same opening line and style of the “Rejoice” in the undated pamphlet, Mazziniananda’s hymnal, and the *Vade Macum*.

The Dharma Sangha of Buddha has been described as the “Caucasian counterparts” to the “Japanese Buddhists of California” (Fields 1992: 145) and as a product of a “modernity (that) involved multidirectional movements across borders” (Tweed 2012: 53), but a closer inspection points to a more specific and revelatory conclusion—at least six of the eight Euro-American members of the Dharma Sangha of Buddha mentioned in two articles published in late-May 1900 by the *San Francisco Examiner* were deeply involved in the occult.⁶² Eliza R.H. Stoddard was listed in local newspapers and the San Francisco-based *Religio-Philosophical Journal*—before, during, and after the creation of the Dharma Sangha—as a Spiritualist medium who gave private readings and conducted “test circles.”⁶³ Agnes White wrote to the editor of the same *Religio-Philosophical Journal* to request that they publish more descriptions of Spiritualist phenomena and “not hear of fraud,” and described herself as a “helper” who wanted to “let in the light.”⁶⁴ Charles Frank Jones was noted as having “devoted himself to an exhaustive study of physical and metaphysical phenomena” and gave several lectures in Los Angeles in 1894 on vegetarianism, esotericism, healing, and the Divine Mind.⁶⁵

62. “The First Buddhist Church in America Established in this City,” *San Francisco Examiner*, 27 May 1900; “Teachers of Buddhism,” *San Francisco Examiner*, 30 May 1900.

63. See Classified Ad in the *Oakland Tribune*, 4 June 1897; Classified Ad in the *San Francisco Examiner* 28 January 1900; “Medium’s Directory” in the *Religio-Philosophical Journal* for 5 October 1899, 4 August 1900, and 14 September 1901.

64. “Letter from Mellitta, Cal.” *Religio-Philosophical Journal*, 20 October 1898.

65. See “City Briefs,” *Los Angeles Times*, 22 February 1894; Unity Church Listing, *Los Angeles Herald*, 20 February 1894.

Three other members of the Dharma Sangha had both deeper connections to the occult as well to one another. George Carpenter was a medical doctor and active Spiritualist in the Midwest for decades before moving to California in 1897 where he lectured for Spiritualist churches, camp meetings, and state conventions in Los Angeles, Oakland, and San Francisco, before joining the Buddhist fold. Before coming to the United States, John Rex Guelph Norman had a checkered past as a “self-styled ‘Doctor’ and ‘Professor’” who created specious Buddhist and Spiritualist organizations in Burma, and was denounced in Theosophical circles by Henry Olcott for “obtaining considerable sums of money on false pretenses.”⁶⁶ While he was a lecturer at the Buddhist Mission and its vice president and physician, Guelph Norman was mercilessly mocked in the *San Francisco Examiner* as a charlatan “Yogi” who claimed to be the son of the Prince of Wales through amorganatic marriage.⁶⁷ Jenny Ward Hays, the recording secretary for the Dharma Sangha, was the daughter of Carpenter and later the wife of Guelph Norman, and was also a proficient musician and performer. She played the piano at Guelph Norman’s lectures and performed at Spiritualist gatherings in the Bay Area with her son from a previous marriage just before the formation of the Dharma Sangha of Buddha.⁶⁸ Hays was the likely creator of the English-language Buddhist hymns used at the Buddhist Mission and the one who repurposed the Spiritualist hymns that eventually made their way to Mazziniananda and then to the *Vade Macum*.

Revealing the Occult within the Buddhist Mission of North America

Near the end of his life, Mazziniananda wistfully told a reporter, “I am the last of my line.”⁶⁹ He intended the statement to romantically reflect on his place in the specious lineage of the Udana Karana Order of Jain Buddhists, but it was true in a more profound sense. By the time of his death in 1931, much of what comprised Mazziniananda’s alleged Buddhism would have seemed anachronistic. A new type of Euro-American convert to Buddhism had begun to emerge in the United States during the interwar decades that was well-read, aligned with the Japanese Buddhist establishment, and interested in Buddhism qua Buddhism (Ama 2015).

66. Henry S. Olcott, “Executive Notice,” *The Theosophist*, February 1899, p 8 ½.

67. “A Yogi In Our Midst,” *San Francisco Examiner*, 17 June 1900, p 24; Church Notices, *San Francisco Examiner*, 23 September 1900.

68. Classified Ad for the American School for Opera and Drama, *San Francisco Call*, 27 August 1905; Listing in the *San Francisco Examiner*, 1 April 1900, p. 16.

69. Nancy Barr Mavity, “Aged Priest Tells How To Live Long,” *Oakland Tribune*, 2 October 1931, p. 20.

Mazziniananda was emblematic of an unbroken presence of occult-influenced Euro-American converts in the Buddhist Mission of North America that began close to the Mission's beginnings and extended for decades. This presence not only preceded Mazziniananda with the members of the Dharma Sangha of Buddha in the 1900s but also continued with those who worked alongside him and continued after his departure, such as M.T. Kirby and Alice and Robert Clark.

Alice Clark worked professionally as a Christian Science healer both before and during her time as a Buddhist and lectured on psychic phenomena and delivered Spiritualist messages alongside Mazziniananda.⁷⁰ She and her husband Robert gave lectures at The Hall of New Thought and Applied Psychology (including one titled "Was the Buddha A Leader and Teacher of New Thought?") and at the Oakland Center of Mind and Soul Culture (along with healing demonstrations) while connected to the Buddhist Mission of North America.⁷¹ Similarly, M.T. Kirby was introduced to Buddhism through his involvement with the Theosophical Society in Canada, and while serving Buddhist organizations in both California and later in Hawaii, he gave lectures clearly designed to appeal to Spiritualists such as "Death and After" and "Buddhism and Spiritism."⁷² In Honolulu, Kirby lectured on "Business Psychology" at the New Thought Center and gave talks at the Metaphysical Center on "The Inner Breath" and on "Life Forces" for the "Occult Students' Course" there.⁷³

Thomas Tweed noted the influence of the occult on several key late Victorian advocates of Buddhism (2000 and 2005), but also suggested in the final chapter of *The American Encounter with Buddhism* that part of the "ineffective institutionalization" of Buddhism in America at the turn of the century was due to "esoterics" being "poor candidates for unqualified allegiance to Buddhism" (Tweed 2000: 154). While there was little unqualified allegiance on the part of the Euro-American "esoterics," they were still a significant part of the Japanese Buddhist establishment in America during the early-twentieth century. As they wove Buddhism together with Spiritualism, fortune telling, New Thought, Theosophy, Rosicrucianism, Freemasonry, and esoteric views of Christianity, they conducted English language services, created liturgies, and

70. "Toes Regrown By Buddhist Priestess," *San Francisco Examiner*, 3 June 1923; Display Ad, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 14 August 1920.

71. Display Ads in the *Oakland Tribune* for 20 July, 20 August, and 10 September 1921; and Display Ads in the *Oakland Tribune* for 6 May and 27 May 1922.

72. Listing for Buddhist Church, *Sacramento Star*, 25 September 1920; Listing for Hongwanji Temple, *Honolulu Star Bulletin*, 3 May 1924.

73. Display Ad, *Honolulu Star Bulletin*, 4 January 1922; Listings for Metaphysical Center, *Honolulu Advertiser*, 1 April and 14 March 1923.

served as a public face for the Buddhist Mission. It is tempting to view figures such as Mazziniananda through questions of authenticity, sincerity, or cultural appropriation, but as David Chidester (2005) argued in his study of religion and American popular culture, even fakes do “authentic religious work.” While outlandish and fabricated, Mazziniananda’s use of pomp, titles, ceremony, and position could still be effective. One Euro-American student of Mazziniananda was “intrigued” by both his “quackery and beautiful ceremonies” and still converted to Buddhism (Murano 1939: 40).

Further, these questions might have been of little consequence to the Buddhist Mission at the time. At Mazziniananda’s annual “Feast of Buddha Grand Solemn Pontifical Celebration” in 1913, Rev. Uchida not only gave a sermon alongside him, but also directly wrote to potential guests in advance of the event to request their attendance.⁷⁴ The *San Francisco Chronicle* mistakenly ran a classified advertisement for the event under the heading “Salesmen Wanted” instead of “Church Notices,” but it was a mistake that spoke to a larger truth.⁷⁵ With a background in the occult and as a literal salesman of patent medicines, Mazziniananda sold Buddhism well. In reports published in the *Beikoku Bukkyō*, various branches of the Buddhist Mission within California were quick to note that the speeches and services of Mazziniananda were well-attended. In 1910, the Watsonville Buddhist Society reported that he filled the hall during his afternoon and evening lectures, and the following year the Sacramento Buddhist Society noted that many *hakujin* (white people) attended his English-language sermons; and nearly twenty of them flank Mazziniananda in a group photograph taken on the steps of the Buddhist Church there.⁷⁶ Two American newspaper reporters in Watsonville and Sacramento respectively noted the “large” and “crowded” congregations that they found at Mazziniananda’s services during that same time.⁷⁷

Judith Snodgrass (1998) argued when Paul Carus’ *Gospel of Buddha* was translated into Japanese by Suzuki Daisetsu and published in Japan by Shaku Sōen, its warm reception in Japan had less to do with the merits of the work itself than its “strategic value” in demonstrating Japanese Buddhism as compatible with modernity, science, and Western intellectuals, and that this was something that it accomplished, in part,

74. See: “Letter to Mrs. Richard Savain from Koyu Uchida” in Gertrude Bass Warner Papers, 1879–1954, Held by the University of Oregon (Box 3, Folder 1).

75. Classified Ad, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 13 April 1913, p. 44.

76. *Beikoku Bukkyō* April 1910 (11/4) and March 1911 (12/3); *Buddhist Churches of America: Volume 1, 75 Year History, 1899–1974* (Chicago: Nobart, Inc., 1974) p. 150.

77. “Farewell Sermon,” *Evening Pajaronian* (Watsonville, CA) 6 February 1911; “Tribute to Late Monsignor,” *Sacramento Bee*, 1 November 1911.

just by the “fact that such a book had been written” (340). Similarly, the questionable aspects of Mazziniananda’s activities may have been less important than the strategic value of his English language services and the non-Japanese crowds that he drew to the branches of the Buddhist Mission, and the very fact that those services and crowds existed. Rev. Uchida, the Bishop of the Buddhist Mission of North America from 1905 to 1923, said that his organization was “not satisfied to settle in America as an ‘extension of Japanese Buddhism’ or ‘religion that followed immigrants’” (quoted in Moriya 2010: 117).

Mazziniananda was in many ways a “bunko bishop,” drawing on both the word’s Japanese and English meanings. His knowledge of Buddhism was not acquired through any scholarly or monastic training, nor through any recognizable lineage, but was created through hastily bought books and his emulation of other self-exoticizing con men of his time. Although he entered the Buddhist fold under fraudulent claims, he furthered Uchida’s aims and was efficient in helping the Buddhist Mission extend beyond the Japanese American community of Issei during the first decades of its existence. Mazziniananda, along with the Dharma Sangha of Buddha, M.T. Kirby, and the Clarks, highlights how the occult was not only a significant presence among early Euro-American converts to Buddhism, but was a powerful force of mediation and acculturation for the Buddhist Mission of North America.

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