In the Winter issue, editor Helen Tworkov made the inaccurate and racist comment that "Asian-American Buddhists...so far...have not figured prominently in the development of something called American Buddhism." I would like to point out that it was my grandparents and other immigrants from Asia who brought and implanted Buddhism in American soil over 100 years ago despite white American intolerance and bigotry. It was my American-born parents and their generation who courageously and diligently fostered the growth of American Buddhism despite having to practice discretely in hidden ethnic temples and in concentration camps because of the same white intolerance and bigotry. It was us Asian Buddhists who welcomed countless white Americans into our temples, introduced them to the Dharma, and often assisted them to initiate their own Sanghas when they felt uncomfortable practicing with us. And it was in our battered and brutalized ancestral homelands that white American GIs and the tourists who followed were introduced to the peace and harmony of the Dharma in the aftermath of our many genocidal wars in Asia.

We Asian Buddhists have hundreds of temples in the United States with active practitioners of all ages, ongoing educational programs that are both Buddhist and interfaith in nature, social welfare projects...everything that white Buddhist centers have and perhaps more. It is apparent that Tworkov has restricted "American Buddhism" to mean "white American Buddhism", and that her statement is even more misleading than one claiming that Americans of color did not figure prominently in the development of American history.

It appears to me that white and Asian Buddhists live in two discrete worlds and practice different forms of Buddhism although they may use the same names and terminologies. Do not mistake me to say that white Buddhists do not practice authentic Buddhism; I am not saying that. It is just a very different form, one that is innovative and exciting in its own right. It is eloquent, dramatic, intellectual, impatient, proud and so very clear. In contrast, we Asian are like Hun-Tun (Chaos) and like tofu, seemingly lacking the seven discriminating holes in
the head and persisting unobtrusively in new and often hostile environments. White Buddhists treat their teachers like gurus or living Buddhas whereas we Asians regard ours to be fallible human beings who represent an honored tradition and not themselves. White Buddhist centers rise and fall dramatically like the ocean waves whereas Asian temples seem to persist uneventfully and quietly through generations. White practitioners practice intensive psychotherapy on their cushions in a life-or-death struggle with the individual ego whereas Asian Buddhists seem to just smile and eat together. It is clear that, although they may adopt Asian Buddhist names, dress and mannerisms, white Buddhists cannot help but drag their Western Judeo-Christian identities and shadows with them wherever they go. This certainly makes for an exciting and dramatic new form of Buddhism.

As an 18th generation priest of the Jodo Shin sect and a past (and only Asian-American) president of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship, I believe my perspective is quite unique for this journal. Certainly I may have made some gross generalizations, but they contain enough validity to be voiced here, even though I am neither a white practitioner nor one of their recognized teachers.

I enjoyed reading the Winter issue of Tricycle and will encourage other Asian Buddhists to do the same, especially since we would probably never publish such a professional-looking and articulate journal ourselves. In contrast, our publications are quite amateurish-looking and probably uninteresting to those outside of our communities. I am sure that Tricycle will become a very popular journal for the white Buddhist community and would like to convey my congratulations. In closing, please remember that we Asian Buddhists do exist (if only in the background) and that we have feelings that can also be bruised by unthinking comments.

Gassho,

Ryo Imamura

P.S. Please do not reprint this letter in Tricycle if you do not print it in its entirety.

cc: Joanna Macy, Masatomi Nagatomi & Gary Snyder