Multiculturalism and Challenges of Religion:
The Place of Buddhism from a Comparative Perspective

Dr Yaghoob Foroutan
The University of Waikato, New Zealand

Introduction

Using a cultural and sociological perspective, this research paper aims to explain the place of religion which has been recognized as a 'broad-band' construct including both individual and institutional elements (Pargament 1999, Seol 2010). More specifically, it focuses on the religion of Buddhism and highlights its competing place relative to other cultures and religions in the multicultural context. The discussion is based on a research conducted in the multiethnic and multicultural context of Australia that hold people with a wide range of cultures and religions throughout the world (see Table 1). This provides a good opportunity for this paper to compare the status and success of those whose religious affiliation is Buddhism with those who belong to other religions and cultures. Further, this paper highlights the influence of the religion of Buddhism in the cultural settlement and socio-economic success of its adherents relative to competing determinants such as age composition, family formation and human capital endowments.

Since this study focuses on the status of Buddhist female immigrants from a soci-demographic and economic perspective, it is worthwhile to mention that there is a growing literature documenting the substantial influence of religion on economic and socio-demographic behavior (e.g. Lutz 1987; Lehrer 1995, 2004; Morgan et al 2002; Dharmalingam and Morgan 2004; McQuillan 2004; Foroutan 2008a, 2009a). However, the influence of religion on women's employment has received very little attention (Lehrer, 1995, 2004). Generally speaking, the influence of religion on women's market employment has mainly resulted from the fact that religion is generally considered to be associated with traditional views and values on gender roles in the household.

Key Terms Definition

In this study the term, *Buddhists*, refers to those female immigrants whose religious affiliation has been identified as Buddhism in the census. As will be explained in the next section, this religious group is mainly limited to the South East Asians. Accordingly, the term, *South East Asians*, refers to those female migrants living in Australia whose country of birth was stated as a South Asian country in the census. The United Nations' publications (*Demographic Yearbook 1999*, and *Demographic Yearbook 2003*) were used as the basis for the inclusion of South Asian countries. The focus of this analysis on Buddhism from the region of South Asia has been explained in the next section on Research Limitations.

Furthermore, this study focuses on market employment which has been asserted both as the most important determinant of a person's standard of living and lifestyle (Collins 1988) and the key indicator of migrants' settlement and success in the host country (VandenHeuvel and Wooden 1996; Bouma 1994, Foroutan 2008b). In this study, market employment is considered in the two stages: 'employment participation' and 'occupational status'. In terms of *employment participation*, women were considered either as 'employed' or as 'not employed.' Also, *occupational status* refers to the major groupings of jobs in which women have been employed. Occupational status has been

classified in three levels: high level (professionals and managers), middle level (clerical, sales and service workers), and low level (laborers and manual workers).

Theory and Data

This paper is mainly based on human capital theory (Becker, 1985; Borjas, 1989; Anker, 1998) and adaptation or assimilation theory (Kossudji, 1989; Berry, 1992; Chiswick, 1993). Based on these theories, here it was hypothesized that the status of immigrants from various religious groups (such as Buddhists, Muslims, Christians, Hindu, etc.) can be mainly explained by their human capital endowments and degree of integration in the destination society. This study uses educational attainment (Borjas, 1989; Chapman and Withers, 2002; Baunach and Barnes, 2003), English language competency (Desbarats, 1986, McAllister, 1986), and length of stay in the host country (Friedberg, 2000) as the main indicators of human capital and degree of integration of female migrants in the host country. With respect to the data source, this study uses special tabulations from the 2001 *Population and Housing Census of Australia* dealing with almost 5.4 million women in the main working ages (15-54). These special tabulations give matrices of relevant variables cross-classified against each other. The matrix or cell data are converted to individual records in the SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) format.

Methodology

This study uses logistic regression analysis. Using logistic regression analysis, this study is mainly based on multivariate results. Before moving forward to look at the results of multivariate analysis, further information regarding the mechanism, rational and benefit of logistic regression is presented here in order to understanding the multivariate results appropriately. In fact, multivariate results go beyond descriptive and bivariate results and explain appropriately and accurately the issue under investigation (that is, the influence of the religion of Buddhism in this study). For instance, descriptive and bivariate results may show that people in particular ages have greater employment rate. But, we also need to consider the fact that a certain age group may affect other characteristics such as education and family formation of people. It is important to note that both education and family are, in turn, important factors of employment. Accordingly, when using descriptive and bivariate results, it is simply said that people in the particular ages have higher employment rate, it does not necessarily provide accurate information as it does not appropriately determine whether age or its associated characteristics (such as education and family) affect employment.

This methodological point is considered in the multivariate results using logistic regression. For example, on the basis of multivariate results, we can say that people in particular ages have a higher rate of employment while simultaneously controlling for differences in other characteristics such as education and family. Accordingly, the discussion below based on multivariate results highlights the employment and occupational differentials by migrations status, ethnic origin and religion while other characteristics considered in the analysis are held constant. Other characteristics, here, contain human capital endowments (educational attainment and English competency), family formation factors (couple status, presence of young children at home, age of the youngest child at home, and partner's income), the length of stay in the destination country, and age composition. More specifically, we will be able to examine the effect of the religion of Buddhism and to highlight the differentials between Buddhists and other religious groups while the competing characteristics are simultaneously held constant in the analysis.

Research Limitations

It is also important to mention that this study faces the following limitations. It is basically due to the classification of the key variables in the main database used in the present analysis. This, firstly, refers to the classification of religious affiliation and particularly Buddhism. This is the consequence of the fact that the main focus in the original database was on a religious affiliation other than Buddhism. Accordingly, in order to have a relatively better coverage of Buddhists, this study has deliberately given a specific focus to South East Asian female immigrants who are more likely to be Buddhist. However, it should be noted that this issue does not apply to Table 1, which is the only source of data in this paper providing a full coverage of Buddhists population in this study.

Furthermore, this study is affected by the matter of selectivity which lies in the nature of migration: the point that the migrants compared with those who do not migrate is a complicated issue that is not considered here. For example, the case of Sri Lankan migrants provides a very clear example of selectivity. Jones (1999:1) has noted that "the Sri Lanka-born population of Australia is obviously a highly selected population compared with the population in their homeland. [For example,] there is… a heavy over presentation of the well-educated and professionals." Migrants from Malaysia, Hong Kong (Hugo, 1992), and Indians in Australia are also highly educated and a predominantly professional group (Jones, 2000; Foroutan and McDonald 2008). It is also acknowledged that the main features of migration from Asia to Australia differ across countries. For example, a high proportion of Vietnamese immigrants came to Australia largely as orphans and refugees under the humanitarian migration program during and after the Vietnam War (Hugo, 1992, 1995; McMurray, 1999; Foroutan 2008c). Filipino migration to Australia, which is dominated by females, mainly comprises family reunion migration (Hugo, 1992, 1995; Khoo, 1999; Foroutan 2008d). Many migrants from Malaysia were sponsored by a member of the family in Australia; they are skilled or business migrants or are students mostly in institutions of tertiary education (Khoo, 2000; Foroutan and McDonald 2008). Accordingly, the results of this study must be understood in the context of these research limitations.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

1. Demographic Profile

The population of Buddhist female immigrants and other religious groups is shown in Table 1. As indicated in this Table, the population of Buddhists in Australia increased markedly from 357,813 in 2001 to 418,758 in 2006. It is also evident that Buddhists are the largest religious minority followed by Muslims (2.1 and 1.7 per cent, respectively). Furthermore, Tables 2 provides more detailed information regarding the population of Buddhists included in this study. It is worthwhile restating that the demographic profile provided here must be understood based on the research limitations discussed in the previous section. According to these tables, the population of Buddhist female immigrants considered in this study is about 216,470 whose major source countries include Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Singapore (see Tables 1 and 2).

Table 1 The Population of Buddhists and other religions, 2001-2006

Religious affiliation	2001 Census	2006 Census
Christianity	69.3	63.9
Buddhism (%)	**2.0**	**2.1**
Buddhism (#)	357,813	418,758
Islam	1.5	1.7
Hinduism	0.5	0.7
Judaism	0.5	0.4
Other religion	0.5	1.3
No religion	15.8	18.7
Not stated	9.9	11.2
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**
Total number	**18417159**	**19855287**

Table 2 Buddhist female immigrants and others by birthplace and religion

Grouping by Birthplace	Population	Percentage
South Asian Female Migrants	226,783	17.5
Buddhists	216,470	*95.5*
Others	6,369	*2.8*
Not Stated	3,844	*1.7*
Total	226,783	*100.0*
Migrant women from Developed Countries	631,623	48.8
Other migrant women	436,504	33.7
Native-born women	3,852,279	-
Not stated	226,106	-
Total	**5,373,295**	**100.0**
Population of Buddhists by major source country		
Thailand	12,696	9.0
Cambodia	9,853	7.0
Singapore	13,531	9.6
Viet Nam	67,087	47.7
Brunei Darussalam	759	0.5
Burma (Myanmar)	3,536	2.5
Malaysia	33,090	23.5
Total	**140,552**	**100.0**

Table 3 shows the distribution of Buddhist female immigrants in terms of the most important determinants of employment participation and compares them with both native-born and total overseas-born populations. First of all, it is evident that Buddhist female immigrants are relatively younger than the total female immigrants. In fact, approximately half of both Buddhist female immigrants and natives are younger than 35 years old (the corresponding proportion is about one-third for the whole female immigrants).

Furthermore, Buddhist female immigrants contribute a relatively higher human capital. For instance, they are better educated than both natives: while one-third of Buddhist female immigrants are highly educated, the corresponding proportion for natives is relatively lower (that is, 33 and 23 per cent, respectively). This educational pattern is mainly associated with the governmental policy of skilled migration by which highly qualified people are prioritized to be accepted as immigrants.

This consequence of such governmental migration policy can be also partly observed in Buddhist female immigrants' English skill: a significant proportion of them are highly proficient in English language so that, for instance, more than half of Buddhist female immigrants can speak English very well (55 per cent). In comparison, however, Buddhist female immigrants are relatively less proficient in English language than the whole female immigrants (the corresponding proportion for the whole female immigrants who can speak English very well is 76 per cent). Finally, in terms of duration of residence, approximately half of Buddhist female immigrants have lived in the receiving country for more than 10 years (about 60 per cent). From a comparative perspective, however, their length of residence is not as long as that for the whole female immigrants (the corresponding proportion for the whole female immigrants living in the host country is 70 per cent).

Table 3: Socio-demographic characteristics Buddhist female immigrants: a comparison

| Country of birth	Buddhists	Native-born	Overseas-born
Age structure			
15-24	21.3	25.8	14.5
25-34	25.9	26.7	22.2
35-44	29.3	25.8	31.7
45-54	23.5	21.7	31.6
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**
Duration of residence			
More than 10 years	61.2		69.3
10 years or less	38.8		30.7
Total	**100.0**		**100.0**
Educational level			
Still at school	4.2	5.4	3.1
Low education	13.3	3.1	7.2
Middle	49.7	67.8	58.3
High education	32.8	23.7	31.4
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**
English proficiency			
Not well	19.3		8.4
Well	25.6		15.2
Very well	55.1		76.4
Total	**100.0**		**100.0**

2. Buddhist Female Immigrants' Work Patterns

The following discussion highlights the main results of this study in relation to the work characteristics of Buddhist female immigrants from a comparative perspective. The preliminary findings of this analysis have been illustrated in Figure 1. According to this Figure, the following two key patterns can be addressed.

First, almost half of Buddhist female immigrants included in this analysis are employed. The corresponding proportions for the whole female immigrants and natives are about 59 and 66 per cent, respectively (see Figure 1). This employment pattern observed in the present study echoes the fact that Buddhist female immigrants are significantly less likely to be employed, as compared with both natives and the whole female immigrants.

Second, the results of this study regarding the occupational patterns of Buddhist female immigrants are also indicated in Figure 1. According to this Figure, about one-third of Buddhist female immigrants work in the high occupations (professionals and managers), approximately 40 per cent in the middle occupations (clerical, sales and service workers), and about 25 per cent in the low occupations (manual and tradespersons). These patterns differ from the occupational status of both natives and overseas-born. For instance, the corresponding proportion for natives and overseas-born working in the high occupations (professionals and managers) is about 40 per cent. Again, these patterns suggest that Buddhist female immigrants are significantly less likely to work in the high occupations (professionals and managers), as compared with both natives and the whole female immigrants.

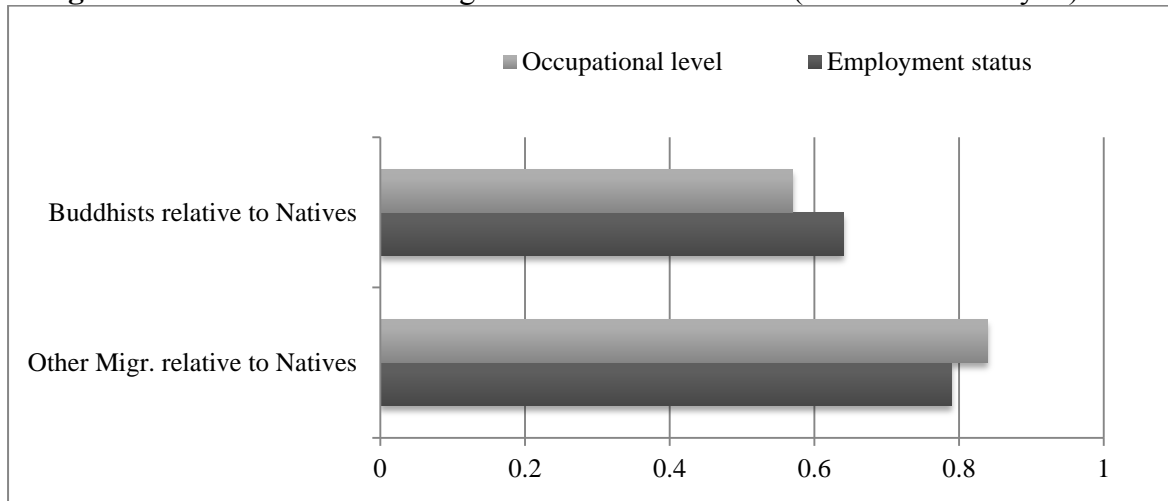**Figure 1:** Buddhist Female Immigrants' Work Patterns: A Comparison (%)
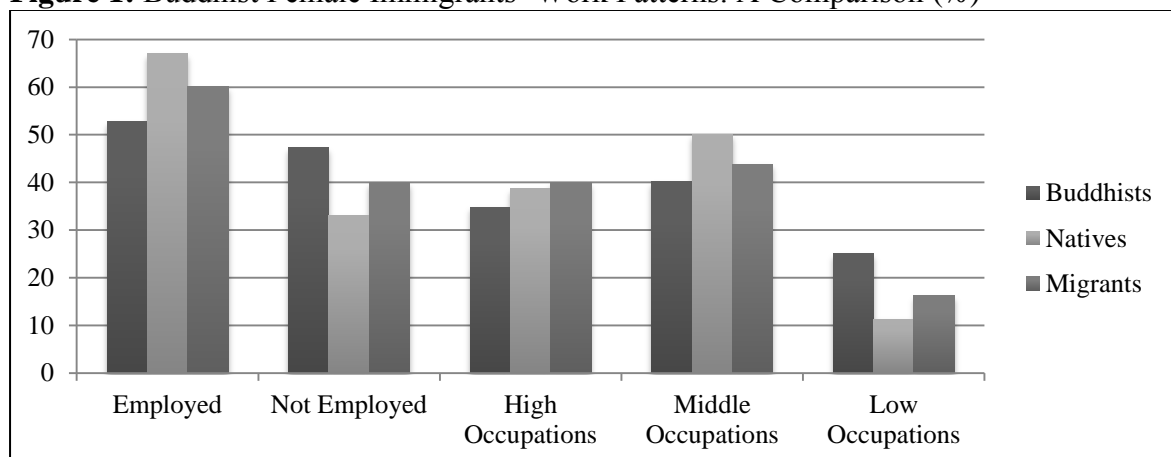
It is accepted that the work patterns highlighted above for Buddhist female immigrants compared with both natives and the whole female immigrants could be partly associated with their different socio-demographic characteristics discussed before. Accordingly, the remaining discussion below is based on multivariate findings, which highlights the work differentials while simultaneously controlling for these characteristics in the analysis. The methodological advantage of multivariate findings has been fully explained before in the 'Methodology' section. The multivariate results of this study are illustrated in Figure 2. According to this Figure, three major patterns can be addressed.

First, while controlling for other competing determinants in the analysis (including human capital components, family formation, age composition, length of residence), Buddhist female immigrants still contribute a significantly lower level of employment: they are half as likely as natives to be employed. Second, almost the similar pattern applies to the second stage of labor market performance. This means that Buddhist female immigrants are also less likely to work in the high level occupations (that is, professional and managers), as compared with natives. Third, in a comparative perspective, there is a

more interesting pattern: other immigrants also hold a lower level of employment relative to natives. However, their work differentials are not as significant as those for Buddhist female immigrants: the work patterns of other female immigrants tend to be almost as high as natives, which particularly applies to occupational levels. In other words, according to these patterns, it can be concluded that Buddhist female immigrants holds a lower level of employment, as compared with both natives and the whole female immigrants.

Figure 2: Buddhist female immigrants' work differentials (multivariate analysis)

3. Explanation of Work Differentials

This section explains the employment and occupational patterns highlighted in this study. The lower employment level of Buddhist female immigrants can, in part, result from disadvantage through discrimination in the labor market of the host country. According to the literature, migrant groups are "particularly vulnerable" (Evans and Kelley, 1991: 722) and are "either through individual or structural discrimination, significantly disadvantaged" (Kelley and McAllister, 1984: 400). Further, migrant women are more likely to be discriminated against in the labor market due to "the combination of their statuses as female and foreign-born" (Sorenson, 1993: 19). This can particularly apply to those who can be evidently identified in the host society because of their religious symbols. In this case, the literature also emphasizes the fact that "those ethnic groups which remain culturally distinct" (Evans and Kelley, 1986: 189) and those "persons who are visibly different" (Anker, 1998: 18) are more likely to experience disadvantage.

4. Buddhist Female Immigrants' Work Determinants

This section explains the most important factors influencing the employment participation of Buddhist female immigrants from a comparative perspective. The discussion is based on the results of this study using logistic regression. It is worthwhile restating that this method is also advantageous for this study because of the fact that determinants associated with migrants' market employment (i.e. English skill, length of stay in the destination country, educational attainment and birthplace) were found to be noticeably correlated (e.g. Evans, 1984; Wooden, 1994; McAllister, 1995; VandenHeuvel and Wooden, 1996, 1999; Khoo and McDonald, 2001; Foroutan, 2011). Accordingly, this discussion explains the effect of each factor while simultaneously controlling for other factors included in the analysis.

The results discussed here are illustrated in Table 4. According to this Table, it is evident that English proficiency tends to play an important role in the employment status of Buddhist female immigrants: sitting well with prior research asserting English skill as a

key that "opens the door to a wide range of socio-economic and cultural possibilities for the migrant" (McAllister, 1986: 24), the results of this study also show that the higher the English proficiency, the greater the employment level. This can also be in part explained by cultural distance and the fact that English proficiency counts as a basic indication of cultural assimilation/adaptation (e.g. Desbarats, 1986; McAllister, 1986; Berry, 1992; Baubock, 1996; Foroutan, 2009b). Here, then, those groups of Buddhist female immigrants whose English skill is higher tend to be more assimilated with the gender dynamics of the host culture; for example, higher rates of women's work outside the home. In addition, generally speaking, the employment status of Buddhist female immigrants is significantly associated with educational attainment. In accordance with the literature identifying education as "a significant predictor of women's employment" (Read, 2004: 55), the results of this study show that highly educated women are significantly more likely to be employed than those with lower levels of education. However, the employment status of both Buddhist female immigrants and the whole female immigrants is not as significant as that of natives benefitting from educational attainment. This migrant–native difference is partly explained by the fact that overseas qualifications, particularly those obtained from non-English-speaking countries, have been observed to have a lesser economic benefit relative to Australian schooling because they are more likely to be unrecognized and less valued in Australia (e.g. Evans and Kelley, 1986; Iredale, 1988; McAllister, 1995; VandenHeuvel and Wooden, 1996; Foroutan, 2011).

Table 4 Buddhist Female Immigrants' Work Determinants: A Comparison (multivariate analysis)

Characteristics	Buddhists	Native-born	Overseas-born
Age groups			
15-24 years	*	*	*
25-34 years	2.51	1.39	2.13
35-44 years	2.25	1.36	2.28
45-54 years	1.66	1.01	1.80
Level of education			
Low education	*	*	*
Still at school	0.59	1.15	0.54
Middle education	1.55	3.66	1.68
High education	3.15	10.54	3.14
English proficiency			
Not well	*	*	*
Well	1.94	1.36	1.76
Very well	2.52	1.94	3.53
Duration of residence			
Born in Australia			*
More than 10 years	2.24		0.95
10 years or less	*		0.50
Presence & age of young child at home			
0-2 years	*	*	*
3-7 years	1.79	2.17	2.00
8 years or more	3.10	4.33	3.83
No young children	4.05	6.83	4.74
Partner's annual income & Couple status			
$ 20,799 or less	*	*	*

$ 20,800-36,399	2.32	1.94	2.19
$ 36,400 or more	1.92	1.92	1.93
No partner	0.91	0.96	1.08

Finally, the results of this study indicated in Table 4 show that the presence of young children at home and the age of the youngest child have a very significant effect on the employment status of Buddhist female immigrants in the present analysis. The results show two main patterns: (i) those with no young children at home hold the highest level of employment; (ii) amongst Buddhist female immigrants with young children at home: the younger the child, the lower the employment level. This provides empirical evidence to support the fact that the age of the youngest child has "possibly the most important single influence on female participation" in the labor market (Brooks and Volker, 1985: 74). It is, however, evident that the employment status of native-born women is more strongly affected by these family characteristics compared with that of both Buddhist female immigrants and the whole female immigrants. This pattern accords with prior studies (e.g. Evans, 1984; Stier and Tienda, 1992; Yamanaka and McClelland, 1994; VandenHeuvel and Wooden, 1996; Wooden and VandenHeuvel, 1997; Foroutan, 2008b) which have observed that the employment of natives is more significantly more associated with family, compared with female migrants particularly from non-English-speaking countries, which also tends to apply to the status of Buddhist female immigrants in this study.

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