A Place for Buddha in Wollongong, New South Wales? Territorial rules in the place-making of sacred spaces

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ABSTRACT   *A Buddhist temple in Berkeley, Wollongong, may at first appear puzzling given that few Buddhists lived there. Indeed, the suburb was home to predominantly those Anglo-Celtic Australians most marginalised by the structural changes to the city's economic base. This problem is explored within the social dynamics of inclusion and exclusion operating within the local politics of place-making. Drawing upon the concept of a progressive sense to place revealed that discourses of support for the temple drew heavily on imagining Australia and Wollongong as multicultural and the temple as an exotic object of the Orient, worthy of tourist visitation. A Buddhist temple provided the city with a source of cultural vitality and enrichment. Imagined as a tourist attraction, a place to visit, rather than as sacred space, a place to worship, a Buddhism sect was perhaps in this way made less threatening to local Christian residents. These results further support arguments that suggest a redundancy to the fixed notions of place as bounded territory and how territorial rules that define whether something, or someone, is appropriately placed requires interrogating the connectedness between social powers and the powers of place.*

KEY WORDS   *Social inclusion and exclusion; religion; Buddhism; sacred space; Wollongong; cultural politics.*

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to address Kong's (1990, 1999) call to explore the processes through which places are invested with religious meanings and the conflicts which arise from the construction of a minority religion's place of worship. Kong (1999, p. 2) argues that geographers should pay particular attention to how, within religious 'landscapes', processes of domination, hegemony and resistance are played out. To do this, the paper investigates the place-making process that enabled Nan Tien Temple of the Taiwanese Fo Kuang Shan sect, the largest Buddhist temple in the Southern Hemisphere, to be located in an Anglo-Celtic suburb of Wollongong, NSW. Although Buddhists have been present in Australia since the days of the Chinese gold miners of the 1860s (Croucher 1989)—Buddhism has always remained a minority religion. Only since the 1960s, and the dismantling of the *Immigration Restriction Act* of 1901, did Buddhist numbers increase. In the 1970s, the most substantial increases in Buddhist numbers occurred with the influx of refugees—Vietnamese, Laos and Kampucheans— from the Indochina War (Bucknell 1989). Yet even in the 2001 Census, Buddhists still

accounted for less than 10 per cent of Australians declaring a religious faith (ABS 2001).

In October 1995 the Grand Master Hsing Yun, founder of the Fo Kuang Shan Buddhist sect (established 1967, in Taiwan), presided over the opening ceremony of the Nan Tien Temple, effectively creating a Buddhist sacred place in the suburbs of Berkeley, Wollongong. The site links heaven and earth—sect members therefore refer to the complex as a 'pure land on earth'. For more than 3 years, Wollongong residents watched the previously vacant, council-owned land on the north side of Berkeley's Flagstaff Hill being transformed into one of the world's largest Buddhist shrines, at an estimated cost of A\$50 million. The 96 500 m^2 (9.65 ha) site includes a temple with its main shrine as well as an auditorium, dining and kitchen facilities, accommodation, classrooms, mediation rooms, museum, library, sleeping quarters and administration area. The adjacent pagoda has two shrines and alcoves for the ashes of 73 000 people. The property was bounded by residential property to the south-west border, the publicly owned Wollongong Crematorium to the north-east boundary, a freeway along its north-west border and, to the south, another vacant council block, the summit of Flagstaff Hill. Materially, the temple's gates, its Buddha statues and Chinese Palace architectural style—dominated by brilliant green, red, yellow and ochre colours—signified the introduction of territorial rules that contrasted starkly with those of the adjoining crematorium garden, industrial structures, power cables, freeway and subur-ban roofs (Figure 1). A new set of spatial practices associated with a Buddhist sacred place were introduced into a suburb previously dominated by routines of work, home and notionally Christian cremation (Figure 2).

The choice of Wollongong, situated some 80 km south of Sydney, may at first seem quite remarkable for a temple of such size and importance, given the city's small number of resident Buddhists and an urban history associated with the booms and

FIGURE 1. Nan Tien Temple complex on Flagstaff Hill, photographed in a south-west direction from above the freeway. (Photograph Gordon Waitt, 2003.)
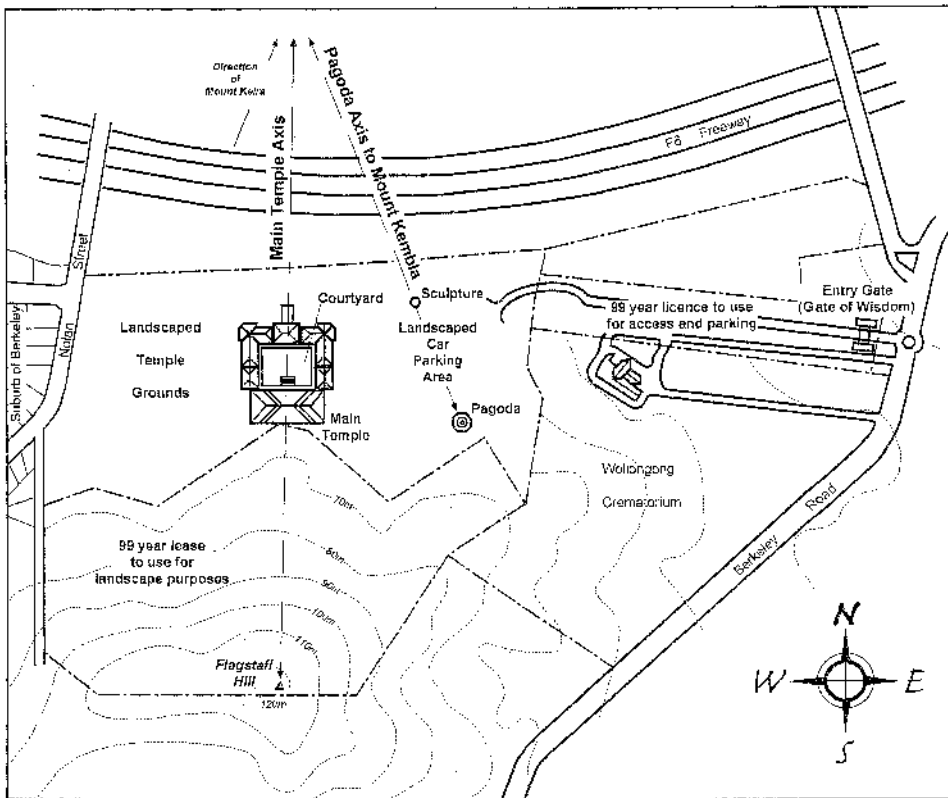
FIGURE 2. Site plan for Nan Tien Temple complex showing adjacent land use, leases from Wollongong City Council and the alignment of the temple within the territorial rules of *fengshui*.

busts of the coal and steel industries. In 1991, when decisions over the temple's location were being considered, Buddhists of all sects numbered only approximately 800, in a total metropolitan population of over 210 000 (ABS 1991). Wollongong remained fairly homogeneous by religion. Christianity dominated and even the majority of people from non-English-speaking countries have a European heritage (predominantly Italy, Macedonia, Germany, The Netherlands and Greece), reflecting Wollongong's post-World War II migration policies and the recruiting activities of Wollongong's steel industry. Wollongong, unlike Sydney, neither provided the infrastructure nor had the economy to attract large numbers of more recent migrants from Asia or the Middle East. Wollongong therefore had no recent migrant history associated with Buddhism. In contrast, Sydney was home to the majority of Buddhists resident in Australia, with particular concentrations in the suburbs of Fairfield (19 904) and Bankstown (13 691) (ABS 1991). Indeed, even as early as 1988, the Fo Kuang Shan already had an established presence in Sydney (the Nan Tien Centre, Darling Harbour). Inner-city Sydney was the more obvious choice of site for a temple.

Furthermore, Wollongong is generally known as a major industrial centre with a legacy of heavy industry, smokestacks and pollution, rather than as a place of pilgrimage. As a major industrial centre, Vasta and Castles (1996) argued that one outcome of the higher levels of unemployment in Wollongong resulting from structural changes to the regional economy was heightened ethnocentrism. Certainly, whatever the expla-

nation, Dunn and McDonald's (2001) analysis of regional variations of ethnocentrism in New South Wales suggested that throughout the 1990s respondents from the Illawarra were amongst the most intolerant of both multiculturalism and Indigenous Australians. They concluded that the Illawarra was not a region of tolerance to cultural difference (Dunn & McDonald 2001, p. 38). Such arguments might well make Wollongong a less likely place for a Buddhist temple.

By the same token, the suburb of Berkeley appears equally puzzling for a Buddhist temple, given that it is the home and workplace of predominantly Christian and Anglo-Celtic Australians. The socio-economic profile of the suburb is characterised as an area of relative social disadvantage as a result of the structural economic downturn of Wollongong's steel and coal industries (ABS 1996). Such a socio-economic profile in the context of research examining ethnocentrism might apparently well make the suburb of Berkeley an even less likely place for a Buddhist temple.

An explanation for this puzzle is sought within the social dynamics of inclusion and exclusion that operate within the relational place-making process between the power of place and the policing of space by spatial managers. In the example here, the sacred space of Nan Tien Temple as 'in place' within Wollongong's suburbs is understood in part through the relational place-making process between the legitimising activities of the city's then Lord Mayor and the Fo Kuang Shan Buddhist sect's Grand Master (social power) and Wollongong (the power of place). The paper illustrates two important points; first, that territorial and social rules are mutually constitutive and, second, that territorial rules about what is 'in' or 'out of place' pervade and structure lives.

This study draws heavily for its theoretical inspiration on Massey's (1994, 1995, 1997) 'progressive concept of place' that reconceptualised places as both contingent and relational rather than as distinctive locations or fixed, bounded territorial units. Places are understood as multiple, contested, fluid and uncertain. These characteristics emerge when places are conceptualised as the intersection of sets of social relations stretched out over particular spaces and interlocking at a variety of scales. Massey (1993) writes about places as the complex intersections and outcomes of 'power geometries' that operate across many spatial scales from the body to the global. Consequently, it is socio-spatial practices that define places (McDowell 1999). These socio-spatial practices result in overlapping and intersecting places with multiple and changing boundaries, constituted and maintained by social relations of power and exclusion. Places are thus conceptualised as in a constant process of becoming through power relations which construct the rules which define boundaries of social exclusion and inclusion.

Both Young (1990, 1998) and Creswell (1996) focused on questions of social exclusion and domination and oppression of one or more groups in society by others. They emphasised how social rules can be utilised by law-making and law-enforcement institutions to help define boundaries if someone or something belongs to a place and, conversely, who and what pose a threat. Young (1990, 1998) argued that those who are imagined as threatening or dangerous 'Others' often become stereotyped in texts circulated by these institutions as 'extreme', 'alien', 'violent', and so on. Creswell (1996) emphasised that these social rules have a spatial expression, the socio-spatial process of exclusion. Creswell (1996) illustrated how in a relational process between meanings and structures cultural ideologies work to codify and regulate space, thereby reproducing spatial hegemony. Built structures enable the materialisation of meanings by providing a set of cultural signifiers that signify either belonging or exclusion. How to act is read from the symbolic meaning of the structures. In this way, place-inscribed

ideologies work to reproduce hegemony, or taken-for-granted interpretations of what is appropriate in particular spaces (Sack 1993). Through actions that apparently disrupt the 'natural' or 'normal' activities of a space, that is, acts of transgression, Cresswell exposed the 'taken-for-granted' assumptions regarding spatial practices. In this way, activities that do or do not conform to the normative landscape are deemed 'in' or 'out-of-place', respectively. For example, in the normative Anglo-Celtic landscape of Australian cities, suburbs are a refuge from the ethnic diversity, disorder, crime and noise of other parts of the city, although, in reality, migrants may comprise the majority of the population and the suburb may contain minority religions' places of worship. Consequently, a cultural centre or temple may open unchallenged in an inner-city location, given that city spaces are synonymous with intensity, proximity and encounters with difference. However, in suburbia opposition may arise since these spaces are conventionally imagined as non-confrontational, homogeneous and stable (Sibley 1992, p. 114). The location of Nan Tien Temple, when considered within a social process of inclusion and exclusion, suggests that a far more sensitive investigation of the social constitution of geographical scale is required, in particular the social construction of the suburb and city.

This paper comprises four sections. The first section introduces the territorial rules that differentiate sacred spaces from everyday spatial practices—rules that often underpin social processes of inclusion or exclusion. The next section provides an overview of the methods by which meanings of the temple were derived from both primary and secondary data sources for three key groups, namely the Fo Kuang Shan, the local Christian ministries and the Aldermen of the Wollongong City Council. The fourth section then presents empirical material that allows an exploration of the place-making processes that led to a Buddhist temple being located in an Australian suburb. This section outlines the multiple and contested meanings surrounding the temple. The conclusion then examines the wider implications of these contested meanings of the temple by discussing how they sustain very different roles being played by Buddhists as citizens of Wollongong.

Territorial rules of sacred space

Sacred space is 'that portion of the earth's surface which is recognised by individuals or groups as worthy of devotion, loyalty or esteem' (Jackson & Henrie 1983, p. 94). Archaeological evidence suggests that, for many cultures, the notion of sacred space is deeply entrenched and long lived (Carmichael *et al.* 1994). A place is ascribed sacred meaning through such cultural practices as naming, knowing, ceremony, rites, and spatial organisation. For example, a temple's spatial organisation often signifies particular beliefs, particularly about life and death. In part, the significance of sacred spaces is therefore gained through their association with a whole range of rites and regulations regarding people's behaviour, and implies a set of beliefs to do with the non-empirical world. Such practices set sacred sites apart from everyday places. The separation of a sanctified site from the profane is underscored by the construction of a temple. Sacred spaces are unquestionably special locations to those actively and believingly involved in their appropriate 'management' or 'treatment' at any given time.

Sacred spaces are also special because such places are vested with identity, an identity that involves both the supernatural sphere and the power of group identity and personal identity. Wherever sacredness is ascribed, powerful emotions and attitudes are involved. Therefore, whilst a sacred space may be a representation of heaven for those

actively involved in a particular religion, for non-believers, or believers in alternative faiths, a minority religion's sacred sites may well represent a source of social discord (Edwards 1991; Thorp 1994; Karkar 1996; Dunn 2001).

Such charges of 'threatening' or 'alien' often easily convert into a planning ground for opposing religious minorities' places of worship, on the basis that temples are 'out of place' with their proposed surroundings. Throughout the 1980s several Sydney municipal councils employed town planning and building codes to discriminate against the practice of minority religions, particularly Hinduism, Islam and Buddhism. The difficulties endured by religious minorities in Sydney over securing planning permissions in Sydney culminated in an interdepartmental investigation (Ethnic Affairs Commission of New South Wales 1991). Local authorities refused planning permission on the grounds that the proposals were out of 'character' with the local neighbourhood, thereby protecting property values and 'preserving' the landscape (Bouma 1992, p. 52; Murphy & Watson 1997, p. 28). Dunn (2001, p. 291) demonstrated how negative social constructions in the Sydney print media of Islam as fanatical and intolerant was one way in which the local 'character' of a suburb was allegedly threatened. Dunn (2001) points out that negative social constructions of Islam in the media became a mechanism that heightened unease and widened local opposition to the construction of mosques in Sydney. Places of worship for minority religions, because they are vested with identity and sacredness, have therefore found themselves at the centre of recent local conflicts in the suburbs of Sydney.

Methods

Reading the location of a Buddhist temple in Wollongong as the outcome of a relational place-making process required identifying the social relations of power and the power of place. Within the social relations of power, three key mediators or spatial managers were identified as informing the competing and conflicting meanings of a Buddhist temple in Wollongong; the Aldermen of Wollongong City Council and the Anglican clergy, acting on behalf of the dominant culture, and monks and nuns of the Fo Kuang Shan Buddhist sect, representing the interests of the minority culture. Meanings identified as most critical to informing the social dynamics of inclusion and exclusion within the power of place are signifiers pertaining to Australia, Wollongong, Buddhist temples, and suburbia. To identify the socially constructed meanings ascribed to the power of these places, spatial managers were interviewed and data collected from a range of sources, for example through participatory observation, and by the collection and analysis of texts, specifically newspapers, letters and official records offering insights into different social constructions of the temple.

In May 1998, in-depth interviews were conducted with key informants from the Christian ministries and with Buddhist monks and nuns. These interviews provided insights into the territorial rules of the temple from both a Buddhist and Christian perspective. They also proved indispensable to the latent content analysis (a process of coding the data into thematic categories by breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualising and categorising qualitative data) that was applied to transcripts of these interviews, by providing important insights in the social worlds of the participants as well as the social setting in which the statements were made. Four thematic categories emerged, namely the temple as 'alien', as 'sacred', and, more generally, depictions of the temple as 'positive' and 'negative'.

Interviews with Wollongong City Council representatives did not transpire because

in 1998 the former Lord Mayor, Frank Arkell, was murdered for his alleged connections to a paedophile network. Other council members and city planning staff were either uninterested or no longer worked for the council. Instead, council documents were consulted to ascertain the official version of the decision-making process. To cross-reference these data sources, latent content analysis was applied to 37 newspaper articles drawn from the three main newspapers circulating locally (a) a broadsheet newspaper, the *Sydney Morning Herald* (three main articles, one weekend supplement), (b) a tabloid daily newspaper, the *Illawarra Mercury* (19 main articles, nine letters to the editor), and (c) a free weekly newspaper, the *Wollongong Advertiser* (three main articles). These sources were searched using keyword searches in the Nexis electronic database for the period 1989–96. Latent content analysis was also applied to the newsletters and brochures of the International Buddhist Association. Five thematic categories emerged from this second content analysis, namely the temple as 'exotic', as 'alien', as 'sacred', and, depictions of the temple as 'positive' and 'negative'.

Nan Tien Temple and the territorial rules of geomancy—a place to worship

To explain why a Taiwanese Buddhist sect would consider Australia, let alone Wollongong, as a suitable site for a temple requires addressing issues of both faith and geomancy. According to the Buddhist faith, constructing a temple complex is a symbol of the devotion of the person who erects it, a means by which they can accumulate the merits needed for achieving final Enlightenment. In the late 1980s the Fo Kuang Shan's Grand Master, Hsing Yun, was contemplating the construction of an Australian temple to fulfil his objective to propagate the Dharma globally, thereby complementing monasteries and temples in 26 other countries, including Canada, Hong Kong, Malaysia, the Philippines and the USA. It is believed that Hsing Yun first learnt about Wollongong when approached in Taiwan by Christine Yuen, a Vietnamese-Australian from the Illawarra, about the possibilities of building a temple in Wollongong. The local resident praised the region's landscape, beauty and proximity to Sydney.

Early in 1989 Grand Master Hsing Yun visited Wollongong and the proposed Flagstaff Hill site. According to the time–space 'surface' of the *fengshui*-influenced worldview, this was an auspicious location. A *fengshui* worldview identifies flows of cosmic energy known as *qi* and is an 'attempt to manipulate the future, by organising one's use of time and space in order to fit the patterning of the universe' (Kenworthy Teather & Chow 2000, p. 312). The north-facing relationship of Flagstaff Hill with Mount Keira and Mount Kembla was an important geomantic selection factor (on geomancy, see Park 1994, p. 247). In the case of the Nan Tien Temple, the Reverend Man Sing explained that in Chinese thinking the temple's location with respect to the physical environment represents a chair, with Flagstaff Hill acting as the back, and Mounts Keira and Kembla forming the arms. Mythological associations with the terrain further determine the temple's alignment. The primary central axis of the complex runs north–south from the summit of Flagstaff Hill through the temple's centre then exactly bisects the angle formed between the temple and the two prominent northern mountains (Figure 2). In these ways the 'natural' world is part of, not separated from, the deity that created it. Aspect and topography were important not only from the psychological perspective of generating feelings of familiarity but also for fulfilling metaphysical functions. By coincidence, Wollongong's topography reputedly reminded Grand Master Hsing Yun of a place where a highly respected Chinese scholar named Woo Long once lived. Despite overtures including offers of free land from other local

governments in Sydney and Brisbane to locate the temple, Grand Master Hsing Yun decided that Wollongong's elevated Berkeley location was most suitable, given its *fengshui*.

The spatial organisation and structure of the site were then designed as a representation of heavenly space, following principles governing all Chinese Buddhist temples. As a model of heaven, the temple performs four metaphysical functions: a centre, a meeting point, a microcosm of the heavenly realm and an immanent transient presence (Turner 1979, pp. 18–33). As a centre, the temple links heaven and earth, regarded metaphysically as the channel through which passes the *axis mundi*: all manifestations (the Many) flow down from the Unity (the One), and the souls of the enlightened (the Many) flow back to salvation (the One). In this connection, apart from being the central path of cosmogenesis (the One to the Many), the temple as a supra-mundane paradigm also portrays a microcosm, or instrument, by which the manifested Many retraced the path of cosmogenesis back to the Origin (the Many Return to the One) (Wilson 1986). The temple as the microcosm represents not only the cosmic process but also a structure that mirrors the ordered universe, the macrocosm. Thus, building a temple is a miniature of the whole architectural process of making a universe.

The territorial rules of a *fengshui* worldview may explain why for the Buddhist sect their temple was 'in place' located in Berkeley, Wollongong. As an auspicious location, Flagstaff Hill provided a site on which to plan a representation of heavenly space, a Progenitive Centre of the world, linking heaven and earth. In Australia, however, principles of *fengshui* do not underpin town planning decision processes. Instead, all development application must receive approval from municipal councils, after a process involving notifying adjacent landowners and consideration of public objections. In the case of a Buddhist temple, proposed for a predominantly Anglo-Celtic residential suburb, this planning process is informed by an alternative, European bounded set of meanings and values, which are multiculturalism and Orientalism.

Nan Tien Temple and the territorial rules of multiculturalism

To explain why the spatial managers of Wollongong City Council considered a Buddhist temple as 'in place' in the suburb of Wollongong required addressing its meanings within the context of refashioning the city as a place of ethnic diversity. Minority religions were valued by Wollongong City Council, under the leadership of the then Lord Mayor, not only as adding cultural diversity to an already multicultural city through their places of worship but, more significantly, as a potential mechanism signifying vitality to potential investors and tourists in what was increasingly a depressed local economy. Cultural diversity, which the proposed temple signified, was therefore embraced to help refashion Wollongong as the 'City of Diversity'.

Frank Arkell, Wollongong City Lord Mayor between 1974 and 1991, played a pivotal role in securing Nan Tien Temple by arguing in favour of affirmative action for minority religions in Wollongong. Early on, Frank Arkell had championed discourses of multiculturalism against opposition to the creation of ethnic minority places of worship. In the 1980s, planning permission was given to a Hindu temple in the far northern suburb of Helensburgh. In addition, somewhat unusually for civil members anywhere, Arkell reputedly possessed an extensive knowledge of Buddhist history, had a long-standing interest in meditation, and was committed to the promotion of religious tolerance. Putatively, these helped Arkell establish a strong rapport with Grand Master

Hsing Yun and other directors of the International Buddhist Association (IBA), with whom negotiations were conducted. Arkell viewed the temple as culturally enriching Wollongong's already ethnically diverse community.

Arkell drew upon multiculturalism's imagined community both to facilitate the project and to allay local concerns. He praised multiculturalism for its ability to enable the harmonious coexistence of cultural diversity that he believed enriched Wollongong. For Arkell, 'culture' was manifested as the fixed, discrete and essential qualities of ethnic 'communities'. To him, therefore, multiculturalism contributed to ethnic minority group empowerment by providing minority groups with an opportunity to assert their own interests and become involved in new forms of political action. Arkell portrayed himself as a not only a very spiritual person, an authority on world religions, but also a person who fought for ethnic minorities and acknowledged the equivalence of faiths. He is quoted as having built a rapport with Grand Master Hsing Yun by drawing upon the strength of his Roman Catholic beliefs and finding an affinity between Buddhism and Roman Catholicism through their shared interest in meditation and silent retreat (*Illawarra Mercury* 26 March 1994, p. 35). Simultaneously, in the local media, he championed the cause of religious tolerance by citing scripture. The media reported his response to the opposition voiced in letters addressed to council by the Christian 'right' (e.g. 'Keep yourself from idols', 'Heathens will bring the country down' and 'God will punish us') by reportedly quoting the Biblical injunction to 'love thy neighbour'. He went on to explain that 'Christ is very understanding of all sorts of religions ... More people need to understand that' (*Illawarra Mercury* 26 March 1994, p. 35). In official council letters attempting to allay concerns over the temple's construction, Arkell also articulated the multicultural rhetoric of requiring tolerance of cultural difference and equivalence of faith, arguing that 'the community of Wollongong is comprised of people from many backgrounds and religions and that they should be permitted to freely exercise their rights of worship' (letter on file from Wollongong City Council 1989). Whilst local authority planning instruments were employed elsewhere in New South Wales to exclude minority culture religions, allowing racism to discriminate against the location of Buddhist and Islamic places of worship as 'out of place', in Wollongong the Lord Mayor helped defuse such prejudices by adopting the rhetoric of multiculturalism.

Nan Tien Temple and the territorial rules of touring—a place to visit

At the same time as portraying the temple as nationally 'in place' within the terms of multiculturalism's rhetoric of equivalence of faiths, Arkell also represented the temple as locally 'in place' as a tourist attraction. Opposition from local residents and city councillors was thus diminished by the realisation that building Nan Tien Temple created not only a place of Buddhist worship, education and pilgrimage but also a potential mechanism for assisting to revitalise the local economy. As a place for tourists to visit, Nan Tien Temple provided an opportunity for Wollongong City Council to generate 'cultural capital', a term used by Zukin (1990, p. 38) to define various sorts of capital invested in culture industries in which 'symbolic' consumption practices provide a basis for capital accumulation rather than production. In this case, consumption practices were enabled through the commodification of a minority religion.

Throughout the 1980s, international competition and the associated process of de-industrialisation severely damaged Wollongong's economic base of coal mining and steel making. Closure of coal mines and massive job loss associated with the restructur-

ing of the steelworks had far-reaching effects throughout the local economy, generating long-term structural unemployment. Higher than national average unemployment rates then combined with negative portrayals in Sydney's print media, which wrote at length about the 'Steel City's' pollution, unemployment and crime, to sustain a grim, ugly, 'rust-town' place image. Such was the negative place image that even Australian comedians ridiculed Wollongong as a 'nowhere' place. In 1984, the place name 'Wollongong' was so tarnished that Harold Hanson, then chair of the Leisure and Tourist Association, unsuccessfully proposed that the city should change its name to 'Illawarra', after the surrounding region.

Since the 1980s, rather than a name change, the Wollongong City Council has run a series of place-image promotion campaigns to counter Wollongong's negative associations. The first centred on the slogan 'The Leisure Coast', the most recent 'The City of Innovation'. 'The Leisure Coast' strategy was to reinvent Wollongong as Sydney's playground. The campaign came replete with images of outdoor recreation and adventure sports set against a backdrop of rainforests, beaches and waterfalls. However, in the 'place wars' over sharing the domestic tourist and leisure market dollar, the lack of a unique, 'must-see' attraction handicapped Wollongong. Securing Nan Tien Temple (Paradise of the Southern Hemisphere) would complement Wollongong City Council's objective of re-imaging the city and restructuring the local economic base within the service sector, particularly tourism. To add Nan Tien Temple as an exotic extra in the tourist attraction ranks of Wollongong, Frank Arkell removed all potential obstacles surrounding this proposal.

Arkell circulated a representation of Nan Tien Temple as a place for local and international tourists, rather than pilgrims, to visit within media releases, in council debates over the land sale value and in letters responding to opponents. In 1989, when Labour caucus leader Alderman Bill Barnetson and Frank Arkell clashed over the proposed land sale price of A$450 000, Arkell argued that the temple would assist with the establishment of cultural and tourist development. In letters from Wollongong City Council to residents opposing the plan, Arkell again raised the potential economic benefits, stating that the

> [C]ouncil's decision to sell the land took into account both the needs of council to realise upon its unused asset and to assist the community of Wollongong with the provision of not only a Buddhist Temple but a significant tourist attraction for the City.

In the local media, Arkell is quoted as saying that 'the centre would attract worldwide interest and many visitors' (*Illawarra Mercury* 3 May 1989, p. 14). His views were substantiated by Ian King, the then Leisure Coast Tourist Association manager, who is reported to have said simply '[I]t [the temple] will be a great thing for this city' (*Illawarra Mercury* 25 October 1989, p. 2). Comparisons were drawn to a similar temple in Los Angeles, which drew over 200 000 visitors a year. Wollongong would be enriched culturally, artistically and economically owing to the temple's presence. Wollongong City Council finally resolved to sell the land for the construction of Nan Tien Temple and assist the refashioning of Wollongong, describing the temple as a significant cultural and tourist development to the benefit of the 'community' of Wollongong.

Despite Buddhism's historical presence in Australia, Buddhism was represented as a faith which was instanced and manifested as 'out there' in the Orient, in a spatial location geographically, culturally and therefore imaginatively 'other'. The media

accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for their reports. For example, the *Wollongong Advertiser* explained that 'the temple facilities will be open to the general community in an effort to promote cultural exchanges between East and West' (4 October 1995, p. 2). Similarly, the *Illawarra Mercury*'s headline 'East meets West at Berkeley' (6 April 1996, p. 3) reinforced the Western assumption that there is an 'us' and a 'them', each quite separate, clear and unequivocally self-evident (Said 1978).

As a tourist attraction the temple relied upon being socially constructed as an exotic destination, the 'mystic East', an object representing the Orient, rather than primarily as a sacred site. In portraying the temple as an exotic attraction, Wollongong City Council relied upon and reiterated the imagined basic distinction between East and West of the European discourse of Orientalism. As an exotic tourist attraction, the 'alien' nature of the temple space in Western terms became the reason for social inclusion in Wollongong. The 'alien', understood as an object of attraction rather than a living religion, perhaps helped to make the temple less confronting for some Wollongong residents. Orientalism, which relies upon a number of binaries (i.e. as 'civilised', 'ordered', 'Christian', etc.) that always set off Europe (the West) favourably against the Orient (the East), therefore underpinned the spatial touring practices of visitors.

A Buddhist temple portrayed as a tourist attraction was thus 'in place', providing a unique site of spectacle, a landscape of consumption, that helped re-image the city. Wollongong was refashioned as place offering leisure activities, cultural diversity and vibrancy rather than pollution, unemployment, crime and heavy industry. The temple offered Wollongong a means by which to express a new, unique, positive identity and character. Buddhism could be celebrated as an example of Wollongong's ethnic diversity and vitality. At the same time, Buddhism provided an exotic minority culture to help glamorise the city (see Zukin 1988, 1998). As elsewhere, cultural differentiation played a key role in the process of re-imaging (see Lovatt & O'Conner 1995, p. 127; Montgomery 1995, p. 143). As a symbol of difference and 'Asian-ness', Nan Tien Temple's social construction is similar to that of Chinatowns in Sydney and Melbourne (Anderson 1990, p. 137). Equally, Nan Tien Temple remains a product and symbol of some single, pure and monolithic 'East', a comparative setting against mainstream Australia. Rather than challenging the identity of Wollongong, the Buddhist sect was simply added as another exotic extra. Consequently, whilst Arkell drew and asserted positives from difference and diversity, he located and confirmed the imagined differences within binaries of 'us' and 'them'. Stereotypes of Buddhists were redeployed rather than confronted. Whilst championing multiculturalism to justify the place of a Buddhist temple as a tourist attraction in Wollongong, Arkell communicated fixed notions of Buddhists' identities and culture (Stratton 1998).

Nan Tien Temple and the territorial rules of Christianity

In Wollongong, local Christian religious leaders welcomed the temple within the national identity rhetoric of Australian multiculturalism, but qualified this reception by warning that its activities must be continually challenged. Threats presented by an alternative non-Christian faith provoked strong negative reactions from the local Christian ministry, particularly the Anglican clergy. Some Christian leaders spoke openly of how the existence of the temple would both highlight theological disagreements and create a local spiritual threat.

Australia's imagined multicultural national identity inspired leaders of the local

religious community to extend an inclusive welcome to the Fo Kuang Shan. The temple was valued as 'in place' when understood as a material expression of multicultural Australian identity. However, their welcome was qualified, since the implicit Eurocentric assumption of a Christian nation remained. For example, following the opening of the temple, the Reverend Reg Piper, the then Bishop of Wollongong, was quoted as saying '[A]s an Australian I welcome it [the temple] but as a Christian I challenge it', adding that Buddhism 'is going to blunt the uniqueness of Christ', and, '[I]t [the temple] will blur the revelations of Christ' (*Sydney Morning Herald* 7 October 1995, p. 25). In further press interviews he stated 'God is God of all people, owner of all the world … at the same time we affirm that Jesus Christ, the man who was raised from the dead, is the only way to God' (*Illawarra Mercury* 7 October 1995, p. 3). Canon Ian Cox expressed the same dilemma; 'we [the Anglican Church] value these people [Buddhists] as people … but we have a different view of their religious faith, and we would want to try and help them to come to understand the Christian faith' (pers. comm. May 1999). In short, questions of faith clearly help to define religious differences. Amongst some Christian denominations, religious difference is to be challenged and denied, not championed under multiculturalism's assumed equivalence of faith. Amongst some of the Christian ministries in Wollongong the scales of judgement were weighted in favour of Christianity. The implied threat to the Christian city came from an alternative worldview provided by the Buddhist faith. For many Christian ministries, the temple, whilst 'in place' as a material object representing cultural diversity, clearly remained 'out of place' metaphysically and spiritually.

All Christian ministers therefore understood the temple as a sacred space, through which the territorial rules of the temple vested followers of this Buddhist sect with their group and self-identity. This acknowledgement often evoked strong negative reactions from Christian ministers, who perceived harm to their own Christian interests or threats to their 'honour' or 'truths'. Strongest reactions were evoked by Anglican minister the Reverend John Thew: 'we profoundly disagree with the Buddhist analysis of life', adding that, 'some Christians felt threatened by the temple which will bring thousands of devotees into Wollongong every year' (*Illawarra Mercury* 17 June 1989, p. 3). The challenges of faith presented by Buddhism to Christianity are not new and have been debated ever since Buddhism was 'discovered' by Europeans during the first half of the nineteenth century (Almond 1988). Buddhism's principal theological threat to Christianity arose because it has no god in the Christian sense, teaching that each person can become a Buddha or 'enlightened one' (King 1962).

Local residents who were ardent Christians also clearly expressed this apparent threat in letters of opposition sent to council and the local media. For example, one Baptist expressed his/her concerns as follows in a letter to council:

> I love Wollongong … but I believe that (as a heathen worship) they [Buddhists] will bring a curse not only on the city council, who gave encouragement for this type of worship to be here, but to the whole of the Illawarra district. It will no longer be the beautiful Wollongong, because a curse will bring all types of disasters. (Letter on file to Wollongong City Council, dated 19 July 1989)

Another Anglican explained in his/her letter of opposition that:

> I do not want a Buddhist temple in Wollongong … there is only one name by which man can be saved—through Jesus Christ … Buddhism is not the way to

God—it is idolatry. (Letter on file to Wollongong City Council, dated 5 September 1989)

Clearly, those residents who strongly self-identified with an alternative faith also appreciated the temple's sacredness. Whilst acknowledging the territorial rules that stipulated that the place was sacred, amongst regular practitioners of another faith it was appraised in terms neither of awe, apartness, otherworldliness, orderliness nor wholeness. Instead, often powerful emotions and attitudes, including anger and anxiety, were evoked because the temple challenged their accepted set of beliefs concerning the non-empirical world of powerful gods and spirits. At one extreme, those individuals who deeply identified with a religion other than Buddhism interpreted the temple as signifying an attack on, or as damaging to, their own religious group's interest or 'honour' and, thus, to their own self. In some extreme instances, therefore, the most ardent Christians wished to exclude the temple from Wollongong. Clearly, for those citizens, Nan Tien Temple was 'out of place'. The temple signified a faith understood by these residents as a heathen religion and incompatible with Christian beliefs. As a sacred site the temple should be excluded because Buddhism represented a faith directly in competition to Australia's supposed Christian views of social and moral issues. The Buddhist temple becomes a symbolic marker of the unabsorbable cultural difference in the local and national imaginary.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to explore the place-making process that enabled the Southern Hemisphere's largest Buddhist temple complex to be located in a predominantly Christian and Anglo-Celtic suburb of Wollongong, Australia's former 'Steel City'. Finding a place for Buddha in a suburb of Wollongong may at first appear remarkable, given the territorial rules that inform normative assumptions regarding spatial practices of Anglo-Celtic suburbs as a refuge from ethnic diversity and Wollongong as Australia's 'rust-city'. To investigate this apparent anomaly required examining this minority religion's temple as an integral part of a relational place-making process, in particular the social-spatial processes of inclusion and exclusion. Key politician and religious groups defined the temple as either 'in' or 'out' of place as the result of an iterative process between the meanings and values they attached to the temple structure and how the temple structured space. To achieve this aim, latent content analysis of in-depth interviews, council records, letters and newspaper articles was undertaken. The specific realities of everyday life were addressed through combining 'fieldwork' with cultural geography's focus on 'representation' (Smith 2000, p. 27).

As a social-spatial process it has been argued that the variables influencing the decision making that culminated in Nan Tien Temple having a place in Wollongong's built environment resulted from a locally specific set of reciprocal relationships between the symbolic and material worlds. In the 1980s, these social conditions were exceptional, given the intolerance, ignorance and prejudice demonstrated by local council planning decisions elsewhere in New South Wales that marked minority religions' places of worship as 'out of place' in most Australian suburbs. First, the Fo Kuang Shan's *fengshui* interpretation of the locality earmarked Flagstaff Hill as an auspicious sacred site. According to the principles of *fengshui* the temple as a sacred site was 'in place' spiritually. Next, local religious leaders of the Christian churches and politicians, whilst ascribing a different set of meanings and values to the complex from the Fo

Kuang Shan and each other, also understood Nan Tien Temple as materially 'in place' as a place of worship within the national and local rhetoric of multiculturalism. Only the most ardent Christian leaders and followers, regardless of denomination, recognised the temple as the site of a heathen religion and, therefore, having no place in Wollongong. For these Christians the temple was spiritually both alien and threatening. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, local politicians spoke of the temple as 'in place' when considered as a tourist attraction, and therefore an integral part of economic-boosterism policies that aimed to refashion Wollongong as the Leisure Coast and City of Diversity. However, in doing so, the temple, fashioned as an exotic tourist attraction signifying an 'escape' from the everyday relied upon binary meanings of 'West' and 'East' framed by Orientalism.

The different ways in which religious and political authorities imagined the temple as 'in place' within the suburb of Berkeley also have important implications for the role of the Buddhist sect as citizens. Those Christian clergy who envisaged the temple as only materially 'in place' but spiritually 'out of place', conceived the sect as having only a limited role. As part of multiculturalism, the monks and nuns provided spiritual guidance for members of the sect already resident in Australia. However, any attempt to spread their faith beyond the confines of the temple's boundaries was interpreted as contrary to the identity of Australia as a Christian nation and damaging to the self-identity of Australian-Christians. The Fo Kuang Shan must therefore be spatially contained within the temple.

Local politicians employed arguments that a Buddhist sect's temple was 'in place' as a tourist attraction. However, in this case they tended to emphasise Buddhism in terms of a taxonomic object, based on a Western invented understanding of the Orient, rather than as a living religion. Such romanticised notions allowed the promotion of Nan Tien Temple as an item of curiosity, a carnivalesque leisure space of ritual inversion from the dominant authorised culture. Local politicians' discourse surrounding Buddhism was entrenched in positive exotic associations. Portrayed in this way the Nan Tien Temple belonged in Wollongong as a mechanism to culturally enrich the city, although the temple is socially constructed as an object from elsewhere, from a culture portrayed as static and traditional. Cultural difference understood in this way framed the temple as part of Australia's multicultural selection box of costumes, dances and foods. Consequently, the local citizenship role for Buddhists was one in which they could be either displayed and marketed as a site of spectacle to tourists or paraded through the streets of Wollongong during special multicultural events, such as 'Viva la Gong'. In this role, whilst communicating a positive portrayal of otherness, popular beliefs are reinforced that essential qualities differentiate distinct social groups that comprise multicultural Australia.

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