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## **Buddhist shrines: bringing sacred context and shared memory into the home**

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## **Buddhist Shrines: bringing sacred context and shared memory into the home**

### **Abstract**

Previous research has recognized shrines in homes as sites of shared cultural memory with the function of contextualising religious narratives and bringing the sacred into the home. For Buddhists, shrines occupy a grey area between the cultural and the religious and have not been widely considered as indicators of religiosity. A quantitative study of 417 British teenagers self-identifying as Buddhists found that the 70% who had a home shrine were less likely to visit a Buddhist temple, but more likely to exhibit daily personal religious practice and to bow to parents. The attitude profile of those with shrines showed that these teenagers were generally happier at school, more collectivist, polarised regarding their identities, and strict about intoxicants. Heightened affective religiosity was linked with having a home shrine, particularly for female, late-teen, and heritage Buddhists. The article argues that, for these groups of Buddhists, a shrine represents a locus for shared memory, especially accessible to those of Sensing Psychological Types, but, for males, early teens, and converts, there is more a sense of shrines giving context to their Buddhist narratives.

### **Keywords**

shrines; Buddhist; nurture; teenage; religiosity; identity

## **Buddhist Shrines: bringing sacred context and shared memory into the home**

### **Introduction**

The way people arrange and appropriate objects in their homes would be expected to correspond to their tastes and values. Considering Britain's relatively secular nature, its homes might not spring to mind as repositories of religious objects. Nonetheless, shrines can be found in as many as 11% of households (Thanissaro, 2010). If the relative prominence of shrines were to be eclipsed by that of cell phones (e.g. Mädler, 2008) or television sets (e.g. McCarthy, 2000), one might surmise that this would be reflected also in the diminishing of religious values. The presence of a shrine in the home, although material rather than spiritual in nature, would be expected, for certain faith traditions, to connect with the residents' religiosity.

In Britain, research so far has extended only to the shrines of Buddhists and Hindus. Of course, having a shrine in one's home could be a mere fad, but, for practising Buddhists, it would be likely that such shrines represent a significant component of their religiosity. When a 13-year-old Sri Lankan Buddhist girl called Manura explained to me the benefit of having a shrine in the home as creating, "...a good feeling in your house and showing some ...religious intelligence and virtue in Buddhism" (Thanissaro, 2014a, 743), my first thought was that the girl must have been struggling for words to explain the influence of home shrines. However, shrines were repeatedly mentioned in connection with Buddhist practice involving affective aspects of religiosity, highlighting the paradox of shrines being relegated by scholars to the status of cultural 'accretions' but at the same time being inextricably linked with religiosity by Buddhists themselves. In order to understand why British Buddhists keep shrines in their homes and examine their cultural functions, the small minority of Buddhists in Britain and their religion was researched through the eyes of the teenagers growing up within that faith tradition. Although

quantitative in its methodology, the research project builds upon my previously published findings of qualitative research with Buddhists in Britain involving structured interviews with families and focus groups with teenagers.

### **Definitions of terms used**

Much of the discussion in this paper revolves around the ongoing critique of modern interpretations of Buddhism where scholars have tended to regard so-called ‘cultural accretions’ (such as rituals and institutions) as somehow obscuring an idealized underlying and unchanging transcendental essence of Buddhist religion. Western scholarship of the early twentieth century portrayed Buddhism as a rationalist, humanist philosophy reinventing it as a universal teaching that transcends cultural, geographic and chronological differences. Although these tendencies have been redressed in more recent scholarship, it is often still the case that portraits of Buddhism downplay as cultural accretions and deem as academically unworthy, thousands of years of ritual practices and the trappings of institutional religion (Lopez, 2002, xiv-xxxviii). While some might dismiss cultural aspects of Buddhism as no more than skilful means [*upāya*], others might regard them as valid aspects of the religion itself, albeit under in the guise of implicit religion – that is aspects of ordinary life that seem to contain an inherently religious element (Bailey, 1997). Some of the vocabulary I have used in this paper to explain religious functions of cultural aspects includes the term ‘shared memory’ which denotes features of a common history shared by a family or group. I chose this term in place of the similar term ‘re-memory’ (in Toni Morrison’s usage – Morrison 1987) since the latter portrays the return of repressed *unpleasant* memories (in her case of the pain of slavery) to be dealt with at a later time. I use the term ‘appropriation’ to explain the process by which the objects in a specific environment are imbued with cultural significance, thereby taking

up the knowledge and experience of former generations (Graumann and Kruse, 1998, 365).

In the context of inheritance of religious tradition, I use the term 'religious style' to denote an attribute of religious practitioners currently central to considerations of religious maturity (Strieb, 2001), but which in the Buddhist context has been simplified in more ethnic terms to the dichotomy where one type of Buddhist (heritage) has ethnic provenance from the countries of Asia and has inherited the religious affiliation of their parents and the other type (convert) have converted to Buddhism independent of their family's influence. Differences between the 'religious styles' of heritage and convert Buddhists in the West were first recognized in studies of North American "parallel Buddhist congregations" (Numrich, 2003). The 'convert' style of Buddhist religiosity is stereotypically practised by Caucasians or those of Black African or Black Caribbean ethnicity. It is a style of Buddhist practice that emphasises meditation and tends to eschew monasticism, devotions, Buddhism's ethical Precepts, the worldly benefits of Buddhism and its social activities (Nattier, 1995). The 'heritage' style of Buddhist religiosity by contrast (also known as 'immigrant', 'migrant', 'ethnic', 'cradle', 'old-line' or 'indigenous' Buddhism), is the religious style of Buddhists connected ethnically with Asian countries where Buddhism has a majority presence. Typical practices for heritage-style Buddhists include generosity, chanting, meditation, listening to Dhamma sermons at a temple, bowing to the monastic community, taking temporary ordination as novice monks, showing respect towards parents, having shrines in the home, support for the monastic community, ceremonial marking of rites of passage and dedication of merit for deceased ancestors (Miller, 1992, 199). I have previously justified the application of the heritage-convert dichotomy empirically as a way to understand intra-religious diversity in identity, attitudes and practices through research with British teenage Buddhists by both

quantitative (Thanissaro, 2016a, 370-376) and qualitative (Thanissaro, 2014b, 325) methods.

Finally, the term ‘collectivism’ (or more loosely ‘allocentrism’ where the emphasis is put on the *interdependence* between individuals in peer groups or families) means seeing the self as part of the collective, where ‘horizontal collectivism’ perceives all members of the collective as being the same, while ‘vertical collectivism’ is more accepting of inequalities or hierarchies within the collective.

### **Buddhist home shrines**



**Figure 1. Example of a Buddhist shrine**

A home shrine for Buddhists is usually a raised cabinet, altar or shelf which houses religious artefacts, in some cases taking up the entire room of a home. For Buddhists who participated in the study, the shrines displayed Buddha statues, high up or located where they

could be bowed to rather than being ornaments as in some non-Buddhist homes (Thanissaro, 2011b, 66). Figure 1 shows a cabinet-sized shrine from a Thai Theravada Buddhist home in England. The framed picture of the Buddha is part of the shrine and occupies the highest position. Other smaller Buddha statues, where present, mostly occupy the top shelf of the shrine cabinet. Photographs or statues of teaching monks and nuns in the lineage favoured by the family occupy shelves further down the cabinet. Paper replica lotus flowers express homage to the artefacts on display. Many of the brooches (in jewellery boxes) are souvenirs presented by the temple for having been a patron to particular religious events. As the favoured temple in the case of the pictured shrine discouraged veneration of deities or spirits, artefacts of these are not displayed. In the case that artefacts of deities or spirits were present, they would be relegated to the lower shelves of the shrine or even the floor. Although not shown in this example, Buddhist shrines would often display fresh flowers, candles, incense and a tray of food samples from the family table. For the family owning the shrine pictured, the mother and her children (aged 9 and 11) sat to meditate in front of the shrine almost every day but did not light candles or incense or place a food offering.

### **The importance of home shrines for Buddhists**

In previous research, Buddhists explained to me that they considered a shrine to create sacred space in the home where they could meditate or worship, take refuge in times of trouble and light incense if a temple visit was inconvenient. Family members might spend time in front of the shrine wishing for success in life, such as a favourable outcome at a job interview or in negotiating a deal. Tending Buddhist shrines was described as an important part of a child's religious nurture (Thanissaro, 2011b, 65), and to this end, Buddhist children were nagged by parents if they neglected to do so (Thanissaro, 2014a, 750). Particular importance was given to the shrine on full-moon days, when candles were replaced rather than just being relit and withered flowers were replaced by fresh ones. On



birthdays or Wesak Day, milk rice would be offered on the shrine. The shrine has been observed to have an additional role in Vietnamese Buddhism – being a site of weddings, anniversaries of death, baptisms and New Year celebrations (Huynh, 2000, 168). In the special case of those belonging to the Soka Gakkai<sup>1</sup> tradition of Buddhism, the shrine cabinet would be of a standardized type<sup>2</sup> supplied by that organization (Wilson and Dobbelaere, 1994). Shrines have been associated with bringing Buddhist ethos from the temple to the home in a way that may help nurture the worldview of children growing up Buddhist (Thanissaro, 2014a, 752) – but the relationship between practice at the home shrine and practice at the temple was not clear.

### **Shrines as a home-based locus of the sacred in Buddhism**

For Abrahamic religions, quantitative measurement of religiosity has relied chiefly on religious belief, affective religiosity (also known as ‘attitude towards religion’), religious practice and affiliation (Francis, 2009, 129-130). As Buddhism is amongst religions that contain numerous elements of *implicit* or ‘lived religion’,<sup>3</sup> there is reason to broaden the range of possible proxies for religiosity beyond formalized religion. Having a shrine in the home has meaningfully been used to identify people as Buddhists in at least one study of religious experience (Yao and Badham, 2007). There are advantages in researching Buddhist home shrines since they allow a *geographical* perspective to be taken of Buddhism that links with a growing inter-disciplinary literature on sacred spaces (Knott, 2005; Smith, 2008), and provide a clear example of the group identity of religion in a tripartite model of religion (Jackson, 1997, 65) where individual, group and tradition elements of religious identity work in layers that vary to some extent independently of one another.

### **Shrines as a crossroads of ethnic and gender complexity**

Religious style provides a further nuance in the diversity of Buddhist practice –especially pertaining to the presence of home shrines for Buddhists in the West – since heritage Buddhists seemed to find home shrines more important than convert Buddhists. This difference between heritage and convert gives one possible variable in the importance of shrines for Buddhist religiosity.

Just as culture can be deconstructed into toolkits of strategies for action (Swidler, 1984), one might ask the purpose of a shrine in the home, and whether such a purpose differs according to, say, sex or religious style. For African-American women, sacred artefacts in the home have special significance in that they bring alive heritage by stimulating *shared* memories of the past. Admittedly memories of the past might be more amenable to sharing between adults than for teenagers born after the fact – but such nostalgia for things teenagers have never known first-hand seems to be part of a heritage shared with the parents, in almost the sense of a family heirloom. What makes the concept relevant to this study is the way in which a shared religious past seems to be triggered by objects in the present context. Interestingly, for children born in Britain, their personal past is *not* strictly that of their parents, but they become connected with their parents' past and religion through shared memories triggered by artefacts in the home and the way these artefacts are appropriated. In a study of South Asian women in Britain (Tolia-Kelly, 2004), since shrines (in this case Hindu) were in the home and not the public domain, the special significance for women of a *home*-based locus of shared memory was to guard against alienating marginalities of gender, ethnicity and religion in mainstream society. Gender thus offers a second possible variable to the importance of shrine for Buddhist religiosity.

Lastly, every sacred narrative needs a context (Smith, 2008, 30) and especially for those who have recently converted from another religion, especially in a minority religion

such as Buddhism<sup>4</sup> having a shrine in the home might lend confidence to Buddhist identity by giving material substance to the narrative of practice in the home. Alternatively, having a Buddhist shrine could be merely a fad and nothing to do with religious orientation if the presence of the shrine were not linked with religious practice of some sort – an assumption we shall test later.

Bringing these possible religious functions of the home shrine together as research questions, this study sets out to explore whether having a shrine made a difference to being Buddhist – and by extension, whether it is realistic to divest Buddhism of its cultural accretions. Also, if it is true that shrines have a cultural function, to identify its general nature – and also to explore whether the Buddhist's shrine is experienced differently by heritage and convert, male and female, early and late teens.

## **Methodology**

### ***Sample***

A survey was completed by 417 self-identifying teen Buddhists attending Buddhist events in Britain or displaying an interest in Buddhist keywords<sup>5</sup> on their Facebook page. The sample consisted of 225 male (54%) and 192 females (46%) aged between 13 and 20 and had an ethnic composition of Asian (52%), White (34%), Mixed (11%) Chinese (2%) and Black (1%) descent. In terms of the temple institutions attended, to give some idea of the national Buddhist traditions included, the sample could be said to include Sinhalese (23%), Thai (16%), Tibetan (12%), Burmese (11%), Vietnamese (9%), Japanese (5%), Bangladeshi (3%), Western (2%) Chinese (2%), Nepalese (2%) and Cambodian (1%). Although for example, 'western' might refer to members of the Triratana Buddhist Community or it might equally refer to a single monk leading a Thai temple – meaning that neat categories cannot be drawn – nonetheless tangible trends can be observed in the

relationship between national Buddhist traditions and proportionate appeal to religious style categories.

**Table 1. Percentage religious style composition of national Buddhist traditions**

<b>Countries</b>	<b>Heritage</b>	<b>Mixed</b>	<b>Convert</b>
Bangladeshi	91	-	9
Sri Lankan	90	7	3
Burmese	89	6	4
Vietnamese	85	5	10
Thai	57	31	12
Nepalese	55	-	44
Cambodian	33	17	50
Chinese	22	11	67
Tibetan	8	2	90
Japanese	5	10	86
Triratana	-	20	80
Other	-	6	93

*Note: Traditions placed in order of heritage dominant (above) to convert dominant (below)*

Table 1 shows that the relationship between religious style composition of Buddhist congregations and national Buddhist affiliation represents a sliding scale, but that certain nationalities of religious provenance appear more open to convert affiliation than others. Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan, Burmese and Vietnamese traditions have a majority of heritage style Buddhists. Thai, Nepalese, Cambodian and Chinese traditions of Buddhism show relatively liberal admixture of heritage and convert. Tibetan, Japanese, Triratana and other traditions as represented in the UK by contrast, have attracted a relative majority of convert style Buddhists. In this sample, of those for whom religious style could be ascertained,<sup>6</sup> 61% were heritage and 39% were convert. The participants were continuous with my previous focus group cohort – meaning that this quantitative survey complements qualitative aspects already published from that focus group cohort and references to these have direct relevance to the description of shrine-related behaviour in the present study.

***Instrument***

A composite questionnaire fielded general questions including whether the teenagers had a shrine in their home, ethnicity, age, religious affiliation and denomination. This general

section was followed by 161 Likert five-point scale (strongly agree, agree, not certain, disagree, disagree strongly) questions pertaining to Thanissaro's (2011a) 24-item scale of attitude towards Buddhism (TSAB-R)[used here as the measure of affective religiosity], and the Short scale of attitude towards RE [ScAttRE-s](Thanissaro, 2012). Also included were 5-point Likert scale Values Mapping questions from 14 values domains selected from a consensus of previous Youth Values Surveys (Francis and Penny, 2013): Personal Wellbeing, Personal Worries, Friends, Family, School, Right and Wrong, Substance Use, Media, Work, Social Concern, Stereotyping and Discrimination, Religious Convictions and the Supernatural. The survey also included issues raised by young people as important to their Buddhist practice (Loundon, 2001, xvi) including being a 'proper' Buddhist, their connections with Asia, perpetuating Buddhism for the next generation, association with other Buddhist and same-sex peers, caring for parents in old age and their sense of individuality. World Values Survey (WVS) questions (derived from Inglehart and Welzel, 2005, 51) to measure the traditionality of values and a set of questions (derived from Singelis, Triandis, Bhawuk, and Gelfand, 1995) to measure the collectivist values were covered in the survey.

### ***Procedure***

Questionnaires were distributed in the period 2013-14. In some participating temples, gatekeeper monks or staff handled survey distribution on the researcher's behalf. For most temples, however, I had to visit in person and was given permission by monks or staff to present the research project at Buddhist youth events. Surveys were completed in the participants' own time and for those unable to complete them immediately, a stamped addressed envelope was provided to facilitate return. For the online version, a Qualtrics

web-based survey was hosted on the St Mary's Centre website (www.st-marys-centre.org.uk). Teenagers were directed to this survey by clicking sidebar advertising banners that appeared on their Facebook page if they belonged to a Buddhist interest group. The online sample was limited to those both resident in the UK and falling within the target age-group. The resulting dataset was analyzed by means of layered cross-tabulation and independent samples *t*-test routines from the SPSS statistical package (SPSS\_Inc., 1988).

## Findings

### *Shrine-related values for Buddhist teens in general*

In overview, it was found that 70% of British Buddhist teens had a shrine at their home. Also, having a shrine was likely to correspond generally with heightened affective religiosity<sup>7</sup> and lower Mystical Orientation<sup>8</sup> compared to Buddhists without a shrine. Having a shrine did not however correspond with a more positive attitude to RE as a whole as measured by the ScAttRE-s measure.<sup>9</sup> In the tables below, the category 'Yes' indicates the presence of a home shrine and 'No' the absence.

**Table 2. Degree of religious participation for Buddhists with and without a home shrine**

	% participation		$\chi^2$	<i>p</i> <
	Yes	No		
Daily personal religious practice	22	7	11.7	.01
Bowing to parents	66	36	29.3	.001
Weekly temple attendance	41	74	35.7	.001

To find evidence of whether the shrine was merely a decoration in the home or was linked with religious observance, the quantitative analysis of the frequency of personal religious practice (which might include meditation, prayer or chanting) showed that those with a shrine at home were significantly more likely to have a daily religious practice (22%) than

those without a shrine (7%). Those with a shrine were also significantly more likely to bow to their parents (66%) than those without shrines (36%). Finally, those with a shrine were significantly *less* likely to attend a temple on a weekly basis (41%) than those who had no home shrine (74%). (See Table 2)

For the remainder of findings concerning attitude patterns, only where there was a significant difference in attitude between those with and without a shrine are results noted. All the attitude patterns reported were true generally for Buddhist teens. However, to explore individual differences possibly masked by averaging that might highlight differences in meaning of shrines to different groups of Buddhist teens, the results have been tabulated in terms of sex differences, age differences and religious style. These results were compared with the statistical links attributable to age, sex and religious style unrelated to shrines described elsewhere (Thanissaro, 2016a) and only the effects attributable to having a shrine were retained. Where, for example, an attitude is entered into the ‘age difference’ table, it means that the significant difference seen generally for Buddhist teens is attributable to membership of a certain age-group. Percentages and significance levels reported in the tables below are for the whole sample of 417 teenagers.

**Table 3: Comparison of shrine-linked values found generally in Buddhist teens (% agreement)**

	Yes	No	$\chi^2$	$p <$
I would do what pleases my family, even if I detest that activity	46	26	14.5	.001
I am influenced by my family	69	44	20.6	.001
I am happy in my school	69	48	15.4	.001
It is wrong to smoke cigarettes	65	40	21.1	.001
It is wrong to use marijuana (hash or pot)	48	29	4.2	.05
It is wrong to sniff glue	64	45	11.7	.01
It is wrong to sniff butane gas	56	40	7.6	.01
People should be encouraged to be friends	72	58	6.8	.01
I like to live close to my close friends	59	48	4.2	.05
The wellbeing of my fellow students/workers is important to me	73	59	7.9	.01
I think Buddhism is the only true religion	27	16	4.8	.05
I have a strong sense of national pride	43	27	8.7	.01

*Yates correction applied throughout.*

As shown in Table 3, in the context of family, those who had a home shrine were more likely to do what pleased their family even if they detested that activity (shows horizontal collectivism) and be influenced by their family. In the context of school, those who had a home shrine were happier. In the context of substance use, those who had a home shrine were more likely to think it wrong to smoke cigarettes or marijuana or to use glue or butane as an intoxicant. In the context of friendship, those who had a home shrine were more likely to encourage friendship, want to live nearby close friends and find the well-being of their fellows important. Finally, in terms of identity, those who had a home shrine were more likely to think Buddhism to be the only true religion and to feel patriotic.

*Shrine-related values linked with age differences*

**Table 4: Comparison of shrine-related values linked with age difference (% agreement)**

	Yes	No	$\chi^2$	p<
<b><i>Effect attributable to being in early teens</i></b>				
You have to be very careful about trusting people	71	53	11.4	.01
<b><i>Effect attributable to being in late teens</i></b>				
I feel my life has a sense of purpose	64	51	5.9	.05
I believe in ghosts	39	27	5.0	.05
I believe in the Devil (Mara)	25	15	4.4	.05
My family are important to me	87	71	14.3	.001
I get on well with my family	74	57	10.2	.01
It is important for a child to learn obedience and religious faith	61	37	19.8	.001
I think it is important to learn at least one Asian language	61	38	17.4	.001
Most of my friends are Buddhist	17	5	10.6	.01
I think it is important to work hard when I get a job	87	67	20.7	.001
I consider myself a proper Buddhist	44	25	12.1	.001
It is wrong to get drunk	48	26	16.5	.001

*Yates correction applied throughout.*

As shown in Table 4, for those in their early teens, shrine-related values included the survival value<sup>10</sup> of being more likely to think it necessary to be careful about trusting people. For those in their early teens however, having a shrine did not correspond with a significantly more positive affective religiosity.<sup>11</sup> For those in their late teens, having a home shrine corresponded with feeling life had a sense of purpose and belief in ghosts and the devil. In the context of family, late teens with a home shrine were more likely to think



their family important, get on well with their family and think it important to learn obedience, religious faith (shows traditionalism) and an Asian language. Late teens with a home shrine were more inclined to have fellow Buddhists as their friends. Late teens with a home shrine were more inclined to think it important to work hard at any future job. Late teens with a home shrine were more likely to consider themselves to be a proper Buddhist and think it wrong to get drunk – and for those in their late teens, having a shrine corresponded with a significantly more positive affective religiosity.<sup>12</sup>

***Shrine-related values linked with sex differences***

**Table 5: Comparison of shrine-related values linked with sex differences (% agreement)**

	Yes	No	$\chi^2$	$p <$
<b><i>Effect attributable to being male</i></b>				
I cannot imagine life without TV	27	14	7.2	.01
Sometimes I buy things because I've seen them on TV	35	22	6.3	.05
I find life really worth living	71	58	5.7	.05

*Yates correction applied throughout.*

For female teen Buddhists, having a shrine corresponded to a variety of attitude differences<sup>13</sup> and with a significantly heightened affective religiosity as compared to those who had no shrine.<sup>14</sup> As shown in Table 5, for male Buddhist teens, having a home shrine corresponded with watching more TV, buying things they had seen advertised on TV and finding life worth living. For male teen Buddhists, having a shrine did not correspond with a significant difference in affective religiosity as compared with those who had no shrine.<sup>15</sup>

*Shrine-related values linked with religious style and other combinations of demographics*

**Table 6: Comparison of shrine-related values linked with religious style and other combinations of demographics (% agreement)**

	Yes	No	$\chi^2$	p<
<b>Effect attributable to being female or in late teens</b>				
We should keep our aging parents with us at home	54	32	17.3	.001
Buddhist monks do a good job	78	60	13.5	.001
<b>Effect attributable to being male or in early teens</b>				
I find it helpful to talk about my problems with my mum	58	39	12.7	.001
I cannot imagine life without internet access	56	38	11.1	.01
<b>Effect attributable to being male or in late teens</b>				
I believe in life after death	56	41	7.1	.01
<b>Effect attributable to being convert</b>				
My family are supportive of me	83	55	33.7	.001

*Yates correction applied throughout.*

As shown in Table 6, female teen Buddhists and those in their late teens with home shrines were more likely to want to look after their parents in their old age and it was not merely the case of having more Asians in the shrine-owning category since (if shrines are not taken into consideration) being female is not statistically linked with the wish to look after parents in their old age and the normal trend is for Buddhist teenagers to become *less* inclined, as they enter late teenage, to want to look after their aging parents. Also females and late teens with a shrine were more likely to think that Buddhist monks did a good job. Male teen Buddhists and those in their early teens with home shrines were more likely to find it useful to discuss problems with their mother. Again, if the presence of a shrine were not taken into account, this would not be an expected attitude for male and early teen Buddhists, who normally are relatively *more* embarrassed by and receive *more* disapproval from their family (Thanissaro, 2016a, 202-203). In terms of disposition towards use of media, male and early teens were more likely to be reliant on internet use. Male teen Buddhists and those in their late teens with home shrines were more likely to believe in life after death.

Home shrines were twice as likely to be found in heritage Buddhist homes as in convert Buddhist homes.<sup>16</sup> This is the most meaningful within-groups comparison because

it cannot be affected by the proportion of ethnically Asian teens in the sample. Heritage teen Buddhists without shrines had some attitudes different from heritage Buddhists without a home shrine<sup>17</sup> and had heightened affective religiosity.<sup>18</sup> Convert teen Buddhist teens with a home shrine were more likely to find their family supportive, but compared to convert Buddhists without a home shrine did not have significantly higher affective religiosity.<sup>19</sup> This could mean that although convert Buddhists had a shrine in the home, they omitted to practise in front of it.

***Home shrines and Psychological Type***

**Table 7. Summary of Selection Ratio Indices (*I*) for significant differences in Psychological Type between Buddhist teens with and without a home shrine**

	% incidence		<i>I</i>	<i>p</i> <
	Yes	No		
<b>S</b>	52	36	1.44	.05
<b>N</b>	48	64	0.74	.05

As shown in Table 7 in terms of Psychological Type, generally Buddhist teens who had a home shrine, were 1½ times more likely to have a Sensing (S) preference. This means that Buddhists with shrines would be more likely to be orientated towards present realities, be factual and concrete, focus on what is real and actual, observe and remember details, build carefully and thoroughly towards conclusions, understand ideas’ and theories’ practical applications and trust experience (Myers, 2000, 9). Additionally, Buddhist teens with a home shrine, were *less* likely to have an Intuitive (N) preference than those who had no home shrine. This means that Buddhists with shrines would be less likely to be orientated towards future possibilities, be imaginative and verbally creative, focussed on patterns and meanings in data, move quickly towards conclusions, follow hunches, want to clarify ideas and theories before putting them into practice and trust inspiration (Myers, 2000, 9).

## Discussion

### *Statistical link of having a shrine with Buddhist religiosity*

This study found that Buddhists with a home shrine were generally happier at school, more collectivist, friend-orientated, influenced by family, polarized in religious and national identity, stricter about intoxicants and had heightened affective religiosity.

Amongst the demographic sub-groups of Buddhists where the presence of a home shrine was linked with *heightened* affective religiosity (i.e. female, heritage and late teen Buddhists), the proportion of total significant attitude differences was 24% in the case of females, 2% in the case of heritage Buddhists and 47% in the case of late teens. Amongst the demographic sub-groups of Buddhists where the presence of a home shrine was *not* linked with affective religiosity (i.e. male, convert and early teen Buddhists), the proportion of total significant attitude differences was 18% in the case of males, 4% in the case of convert Buddhists and 6% in the case of early teens. What is particularly noticeable for late teens is the large number of attitude differences attributable to the age group as if many of the religious values associated with Buddhism (e.g. belief in life after death, ghosts, the devil, importance of family, obedience, having Buddhist friends, work ethic, avoiding drunkenness and being a proper Buddhist) – values usually eclipsed after adolescence – are sustained into late teen age in the case of having a shrine in the home.

Since shrines are significantly linked with affective Buddhist religiosity in female, heritage and Buddhists in their late teens, there is a sense in which, the shrine can be considered as a locus for religious shared memory for these groups and it is likely that this also aligns with compatibility for those whose Psychological Type shows a Sensing [S] preference which indicates a tendency for richness of sensory data to inspire traditional values and favour mundane and familiar surroundings. As for male, convert and Buddhists in their early teens, where shrines are obviously important, but fail to correspond with

increased affective religiosity, the shrine might be seen as being more of a context for their religious narratives, especially collectivist values.

***Ignoring cultural accretions belittles female, heritage and late teen religiosity***

Whether a shrine is a cultural artefact or an element of religiosity will ultimately depend on how one appropriates the shrine as a special focus of worship. Implicit religion is an important part of everyday life certainly to the extent that for Buddhists, shrines correspond with a significant difference in affective religiosity – at present the most secure predictor for Buddhist religiosity (Thanissaro, 2016b). Especially where it has been demonstrated in this study that having a shrine was significantly linked with the religiosity of heritage, female and late teen Buddhists, to ignore shrines because they are cultural artefacts would be to devalue the religiosity of these groups. Since the nature of Buddhism, like other Dharmic religions, is not bounded by strict definitions of a personal God or limited to certain religious rituals, the shrine is important because religious learning is part of socialisation in the home.

***The function of the Buddhist home shrine***

The demonstrated statistical links make it problematic to dismiss shrines as a ‘mere’ cultural accretion that can somehow be separated from ‘essential’ Buddhist religion. An understanding of Buddhist religiosity more potentially emancipatory for Buddhist participants, might involve conceiving culture not as a system of symbols and meanings, but as a diverse collection of tools, with different intended religious purposes (Sewell, 1999, 45-46) – cultural elements which can then be deployed as variables to elucidate the purpose of such religious/cultural elements as the shrine. It is of course possible that a shrine could, like many ‘garden centre’ retailed Buddha statues, prove to be nothing more

than a trophy or a decoration in the home that conjures up no religious awareness, in cases where it is not appropriated as part of the residents' Buddhist practice. For Buddhists though, shrines seem associated with certain attitudes and possibly practices – conceivably being a place where the family can gather to perform religious rites such as personal religious practice and bowing to parents. Although the functions outlined below are unlikely to be mutually exclusive, they can be drawn together loosely under the headings of shared memory and contextualization of narratives.

#### *The function of shared memory*

The shrine appears to function as a locus of shared memory in the home in a way which is particularly important for females, heritage and late teen Buddhists. In this role, the shrine is appropriated to help remind Buddhists about the Buddha and Buddhist clergy as symbols of their religion. Attitudes amongst females, heritage and late teen Buddhists demonstrated by this study that are relevant to the shared memory function include feeling life has a sense of purpose, considering themselves a proper Buddhist and thinking Buddhist monks did a good job. The shrine has a function relating to the way they have become Buddhist (i.e. by inheriting their religion from their parents) rather than being determined merely by their ethnicity. This function may be related to the Sensing preference in Psychological Type and help sustain religious values into late teenage for many attitudes usually lost after adolescence. It is known that Sensing children prefer to learn by familiarization (Myers and Myers, 1980, 61) and having the shrine as part of one's familiar home surroundings would be particularly effective for its appropriation. This mechanism may be explained by a need described in educational literature for young people to have images stimulating their imaginations in order for content to be committed

to memory (Jardine, 2006) and in this case by appropriating shrines Buddhist teenagers have accessed ownership of the knowledge and experience of former generations.

*The function of contextualizing narratives*

The shrine also functioned by giving context to the narratives of Buddhist practices of implicit religion – corresponding with the Buddhist observation that to practise in front of a shrine made meditation meaningful since without the shrine, meditation could be considered pointless or the equivalent of praying to nothing (Thanissaro, 2014a, 743). The presence of the shrine has the function of symbolization since material items to which the heart ‘feels connected’ can be understood as symbols of the self and become a material expression of identity formation (Mädler, 2008, 16, 19). This was particularly a function that seemed to justify the importance of the shrine for males, convert and early teen Buddhists and aligned with attitudes identified in this study such as finding life worth living, importance given to the visual media (such as TV, advertising and the internet), wanting to discuss problems with their mother and finding their family supportive. If it is accepted that religiosity or spirituality is a multi-dimensional concept, the home shrine might find a place among ‘other religious media’ – media that are neither scripture nor meditation – identified in the factor structure of ‘private religious practices’ (Masters et al., 2009, 113).

These functions of the shrine indicate the detail of what the interviewee quoted in the introduction meant, when she referred to ‘religious intelligence and virtue in Buddhism’ being indicated by the presence of a shrine in a Buddhist’s home. If she had more awareness of her gendered and heritage perspective, and had been equipped with more sociological vocabulary, she might have mentioned shared memory and narrative context. The cultural function of shrines which makes them sufficiently important for

Buddhists in Britain to want to display them in their homes is firstly because they help give children a religious heritage that they can then share with their parents since images appear to be needed to form shared religious memories and secondly, because they bring context into the home possibly replacing the role of the temple as a geographical location to imbue practice with meaning as part of a Buddhist narrative. If it is true that shrines bring Buddhist ethos into the home, the effect is likely to be most noticeably religious and linked with shared memory for heritage, female and late teen Buddhists. In conclusion, having a shrine *does* seem to correspond with differences in being Buddhist, especially for heritage-style Buddhists, late teens and females – and could usefully be considered an individual difference for further research on Buddhist religiosity.

### ***Further research***

The findings of this study invite further exploration of Buddhist religiosity along the lines of the geography of sacred space. It would be worth elaborating upon study of shrine-related practice by use of qualitative research methodology. Such future research might explore details beyond the scope of the present study such as observation of the daily context in which informants practise in relation to their shrines, how they practise, what they worship, what they chant, how often they chant, whether they are alone when they practise or with their family, and the differences in the use of the shrine from one national Buddhist group to another.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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## Notes

1. Helen Waterhouse provides a detailed reflection on the way the shrine is used by British members of this Buddhist tradition.
2. The shrine would contain a *gohonzon* calligraphy scroll of the Lotus Sutra and is passed down from father to son for as long as Soka Gakkai faith in the family continues
3. For example, of the 38 religious practices prescribed for Buddhists in the Maṅgala Sutta (Khp.2) more than half belong to the mundane category of 'lived religion' (e.g. choosing your friends carefully, working hard for a living, ensuring harmony in the family life) rather than transcendental or ascetic practices.
4. Buddhists represented only 0.4% of the British demographic at the time of writing.
5. The keywords included the words: arhat (Buddhism), Buddhism, Buddhism Theravada, Buddhist, Buddhist meditation, Burmese Buddhist temple, Dhammakaya meditation, Dhammakaya movement, Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition, FWBO, Gautama Buddha, interbeing, Karma Kagyu, Mahayana, merit (Buddhism), New Kadampa Tradition, Order of Interbeing, Samatha, Soka Gakkai International SGI, Theravada, Theravada Buddhism, Theravada Buddhist, Tibetan Buddhism, Triratna Buddhist Community, Vietnamese Family of Buddhism, Vipassana, Vipassana meditation, Zen, Thich Nhat Hanh, Buddhism in Bangladesh, Buddhahood, Diamond Way Buddhism, Buddha's Dharma, Pure Land Buddhism, Buddha's Light International Association.
6. Not possible where ethnicity was 'mixed'
7.  $M_{with\ shrine}=97.77$ , S.D.=12.24,  $M_{no\ shrine}=92.84$ , S.D.=14.62,  $t(195)=-3.279$ ,  $p<.001$
8.  $M_{with\ shrine}=69.92$ , S.D.=15.51,  $M_{no\ shrine}=75.39$ , S.D.=19.23,  $t(114)=2.441$ ,  $p<.05$
9.  $M_{with\ shrine}=24.37$ , S.D. = 4.80,  $M_{no\ shrine}=23.80$ , S.D. = 5.32,  $t(413)=-1.074$ , NS
10. In the World Values Survey, survival values are conceptualised as a lack of 'self-expression'.
11.  $M_{with\ shrine}=97.71$ , S.D.=11.52,  $M_{no\ shrine}=95.09$ , S.D.=14.12,  $t(78)=-1.249$ , NS
12.  $M_{with\ shrine}=97.84$ , S.D.=13.23,  $M_{no\ shrine}=90.98$ , S.D.=14.86,  $t(123)=-3.158$ ,  $p<.01$
13. For example, female Buddhist teens with a home shrine were more likely to attract disapproval from parents concerning their spare time activities (29% versus 19%), think RE helped them understand different religions (72% versus 57%), worry about exams at school (66% versus 50%), lack sympathy for the unemployed (49% versus 37%) and fear unemployment (70% versus 53%). Female Buddhist teens with a home shrine found it more helpful to talk about problems with their friends (68% versus 52%).
14.  $M_{with\ shrine}=98.40$ , S.D.=13.07,  $M_{no\ shrine}=91.37$ , S.D.=14.15,  $t(189)=-3.180$ ,  $p<.01$
15.  $M_{with\ shrine}=97.17$ , S.D.=11.43,  $M_{no\ shrine}=93.82$ , S.D.=14.94,  $t(222)=-1.854$ , NS
16.  $M_{heritage}=86\%$  incidence,  $M_{convert}=43\%$  incidence,  $\chi^2=75.4$ ,  $p<.001$
17. For example, heritage Buddhist teens with a home shrine were more likely to agree with the vertical-individualist assertion about being annoyed by others performing better than them (27% versus 17%).
18.  $M_{with\ shrine}=98.55$ , S.D.=11.50,  $M_{no\ shrine}=91.13$ , S.D.=12.46,  $t(38)=-3.113$ ,  $p<.01$
19.  $M_{with\ shrine}=96.64$ , S.D.=14.60,  $M_{no\ shrine}=92.40$ , S.D.=15.27,  $t(134)=-1.693$ , NS

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