



BUDDHIST TEEN BOWING TO PARENTS: STRADDLING THE BORDER BETWEEN PRIVATE AND PUBLIC RELIGION

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This article straddles several borders, but the most significant border crossed is the home's threshold that separates the private practice of the family and religion in the public domain. It is a thoroughfare of religious communication very much in the eye of the media which currently seem focused on identifying features of religious practice that mark deviation from orthodoxy or orthopraxy into radicalized versions of religion or extremism. Seemingly private decisions such as wearing a headscarf or growing a beard are regularly given public religious significance by the media. At the same time, mainstream religion often emphasises only extrinsic and institutional expressions – although there is much evidence even that Christian religiosity¹ reaches out into other aspects of public life, although it could be argued that this faith emphasises extrinsic religiosity and links to public engagement would be closer to religious involvement. Similarly formal education in places of worship or the classroom is often assumed to be the sole purveyor of religious values. The practices described in this article run counter to these trends because they deal with nurture practices in the home and consequences of these for public religious life.

¹ e.g. Sylvia G. Baker, *Swimming against the tide: the new independent Christian schools and their teenage pupils* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2013) – where more deeply Christian adolescents expressed attitudes concerning the public domain such as politics, sexual morality and global fears.

PARENTAL ROLE IN RELIGIOUS NURTURE

There was a time when religiosity was equated with a more intellectual understanding of religious concepts and social scientists found it hard to establish how parents managed to instill religious values in their children.² However since the means to measure the more *affective* quality of attitude towards religion has become more reliable, the relationship with parents has been confirmed as one of the biggest predictors of the degree to which religion will be nurtured in their children.³ The influence of parents is more clearly seen in their children's public and overt religious practice than in their private and more covert religious attitudes.⁴ Parents play a crucial role beyond attending a place of worship – supporting faith in conversation and example at home. Nonetheless, parental efforts will be in vain if the child does not have a warm and affectionate relationship with them.⁵

BOWING TO PARENTS

Bowing to statues of the Buddha or to Buddhist monks is fairly ubiquitous amongst Buddhists of all denominations. Despite the fact that in Asia, parents and children spend more time together than is typical in western societies, bowing to parents is practised only by some types of Buddhists. As illustrated in Figure 1, bowing to parents is defined as lowering the head from the kneeling position, standing with the hands at the side of the body and sliding the head down towards the knees or bending down to touch or kiss the feet of parents – a motion made with the whole

² Dean R. **Hoge**, Gregory H. **Petrillo** and Ella I. **Smith**, "Transmission of religious and social values from parents to teenage children" – *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 44/3 (1982), 569-580.

³ Gary D. **Bouma**, *Australian soul: religion and spirituality in the twenty-first century* (Melbourne, VIC: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

⁴ Leslie J. **Francis**, "Parental influence and adolescent religiosity: A study of church attendance and attitude toward Christianity among adolescents 11 to 12 and 15 to 16 years old" – *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, 3/4 (1993), 241-253.

⁵ Jacqueline J. **Goodnow**, "Parenting and the Transmission and Internalization of Values: From Social-Cultural Perspectives to Within-Family Analyses" – *Parenting and Children's Internalization of Values*. Eds. Joan E. Grusec and Leon Kuczynski (New York: John Wiley, 1997), 333-361.



Figure 1. Example of a teenage Buddhist bowing to a parent

body rather than merely saluting, nodding respectfully in their direction or gesturing deference. A school-based survey in London of 369 adolescents, found that bowing to parents featured in the religious lives of Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Muslims and Sikh adolescents,⁶ and that bowing to parents corresponded with certain attitudes shared across religions including rejection of alcohol use, thinking RE helped them understand their own religion, thinking there to be a difference between how their religion was portrayed at school and at home, openness to religious storytelling and *not* wanting to look after parents in old age. The numbers of Buddhists completing that particular survey were not sufficient to draw definite conclusions about the role of bowing to parents for *Buddhist* religiosity and identity – or the way such a home-based practice translated into public domain expressions of religion.

Buddhism and Youth in Britain

At the time of the 2011 census, there were 247,743 Buddhists in England and Wales, 22,715 of whom were teenagers.⁷ Some of these Buddhists

⁶ Phra N. **Thanissaro**, “Heaven starts at your parent’s feet’: Adolescent bowing to parents and associated spiritual attitudes” – *International Journal of Children’s Spirituality*, 15/4 (2010), 296.

⁷ Office of National Statistics, “2011 Census: Key Statistics for England and Wales, March

have ethnic roots in the countries of Asia (so-called ‘heritage Buddhists’)⁸ while others have converted to Buddhism independent of their family’s influence (so-called ‘convert’ Buddhists).⁹ The two sorts of Buddhists have *styles* of religious practice often as different from each other as they are from other religions – and therefore warrant separate examination.¹⁰

Rationale and research questions

The main thrust of this study is to examine the attitudes significantly linked with bowing to parents, many of which have consequences for public expressions of religiosity and the extent to which a ‘cultural’ tradition practised in the privacy of the home extends across that border into the public domain. Supplementary issues examined by this article – since there is a tendency in Buddhist Studies to ignore cultural accretions, not regarding practices like bowing to parents as *bona fide* religiosity – is to elucidate to what extent ‘bracketing out’ culture helps or hinders an understanding of Buddhist identity, and exploring whether bowing to parents made a difference to being Buddhist. In order to clarify any role of bowing to parents for religious nurture, the further question was explored whether the practice affected Buddhist teenagers differently in their early and late teens or as a function of religious style, or on the contrary, whether bowing to parents was merely a means of binding a religious community together [as theorized by Deleuze].¹¹ Finally, the study investigated whether bowing to parents affects attitudes differently for Buddhists and non-Buddhists.

2011” http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171778_290685.pdf and “Religion (detailed) by sex by age – England and Wales” <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/census/2011/census-data/2011-census-ad-hoc-tables/ct0116--religion-detailed-by-sex-by-age--england-and-wales.xls>, accessed 17.09.2015.

⁸ Joyce **Miller**, *The Forest Hermitage: an ethnographic study of a Buddhist community in Warwickshire* (Warwick: University of Warwick, 1992), 199.

⁹ Jan **Nattier**, “Visible and Invisible: the Politics of Representation in Buddhist America” – *Tricycle, The Buddhist Review*, 5/1 (1995), 42-49.

¹⁰ Paul D. **Numrich**, “Two Buddhisms Further Considered” – *Contemporary Buddhism*, 4/1 (2003), 55-78.

¹¹ Gilles **Deleuze**, “Three Aspects of Culture” – *The Deleuze Reader*. Ed. Constantin V. Boundas (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 245-252.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

A survey was completed by a convenience sample of 417 teens attending temples in Britain or displaying an interest in Buddhist keywords¹² on their Facebook page, all of whom self-identified as Buddhists.¹³ The sample consisted of 225 male (54%) and 192 females (46%) aged between 13 and 20 ($M=16.33$, $SD=2.34$) and included Buddhists of Asian (52%), White (34%), Mixed (11%) Chinese (2%) and Black (1%) ethnicity. In terms of the temple institutions attended, to give some idea of the Buddhist denomination, 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%). In this sample, of those for whom religious style could be ascertained,¹⁴ 61% were heritage and 39% were converts.

Instrument

A composite questionnaire deployed general questions including whether and how often the teenagers bowed to parents, 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 24-item scale of attitude to Buddhism (TSAB)¹⁵ and the Short scale of attitude towards Reli-

¹² 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.

¹³ The 417 self-identifiers were a subset of 716 teens completing the survey who had interest in or involvement with Buddhism.

¹⁴ Not possible where ethnicity was 'mixed'.

¹⁵ Phra N. **Thanissaro**, "Measuring attitude towards Buddhism and Sikhism: Internal consistency reliability for two new instruments" – *Mental Health, Religion and Culture*, 14/8 (2011), 797-803.

gious Education (RE) [ScAttRE-s].¹⁶ Also included were 5-point Likert scale Values Mapping questions from 14 values domains (11 secular and 3 religious) selected from a consensus of previous Youth Values Surveys:¹⁷ Wellbeing, Worries, Family, School, Religious Education, Right and Wrong, Substance Use, Work, Social Concern, Discrimination, Religious Convictions and Religion in Society; topics raised by young people as important to their Buddhist practice¹⁸ on issues 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) items on derived from Inglehart and Welzel¹⁹ to measure the traditionality of values and a set of questions to measure the collectivist values in combination with the expectation of social equality (horizontal collectivism) or acceptance of social hierarchy (vertical collectivism).²⁰

Procedure

Surveys were distributed in the period 2013-14 and completed in the participants’ own time. For those unable to complete the survey immediately, a stamped addressed envelope was provided to facilitate return. For the online version of the survey a Qualtrics web-based survey software was hosted on the St Mary’s Centre website.²¹ Teenagers were directed to this survey by clicking sidebar advertising banners that appeared on their

¹⁶ Phra N. **Thanissaro**, “Measuring attitude towards RE: factoring pupil experience and home faith background into assessment” – *British Journal of Religious Education*, 34/2 (2012), 195-212.

¹⁷ Leslie J. **Francis** and Gemma **Penny**, “Religion and values: A review of empirical research” – *The Routledge International Handbook of Education, Religion and Values*. Eds. James Arthur and Terence Lovat (London: Routledge 2013), 197-209.

¹⁸ Sumi **Loundon**, *Blue Jean Buddha: Voices of Young Buddhists* (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2001), xvi.

¹⁹ Ronald **Inglehart** and Christian **Welzel**, *Modernization, Cultural Change and Democracy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 51.

²⁰ Theodore M. **Singelis** et al., “Horizontal and Vertical Dimensions of Individualism and Collectivism: A Theoretical and Measurement Refinement” – *Cross-Cultural Research*, 29/3 (1995), 240-275.

²¹ www.st-marys-centre.org.uk.

Facebook page if they belonged to a Buddhism-related 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 analysed by means of the cross-tabulation and independent samples *t*-test routines of the SPSS statistical package.²²

FINDINGS

In overview, it was found that 56% of Buddhist teens bowed to their parents – in terms of frequency of bowing, 22% bowed daily, 5% bowed weekly, 3% bowed monthly and 26% bowed on special occasions. Bowing was significantly more likely to be found in Buddhist adolescents (63%) than in an equivalent sample²³ of non-Buddhists (22% incidence) [$\chi^2(1) = 59.92, p < .001$]. There was no significant difference between incidence of bowing between male Buddhists (59%) and female Buddhists (54%) [$\chi^2(1) = 0.68, NS$]. Bowing was significantly *more* likely to be found in Buddhists in their early teens (61%) than in their late teens (49%) [$\chi^2(1) = 4.92, p < .05$]. There was no significant difference between incidence of bowing to parents between those of managerial (53%), intermediate (59%) and elementary (62%) social classes [$\chi^2(2) = 1.58, NS$]. Bowing was significantly *more* likely to be found in heritage Buddhists (79%) than convert Buddhists (18%) [$\chi^2(1) = 129.85, p < .001$].

In the tables that follow, showing specific attitudes that corresponded significantly with bowing to parents, the category ‘Yes’ indicates some degree of bowing to parents and ‘No’ the absence of any bowing. Only where there was a significant difference in attitude between bowers and non-bowers are results reported. For clarity, where significant differences were found irrespective of age-group or religious style, results were included in Part 1 of the findings showing general effects linked with bowing in terms of publicly and privately vested attitudes. Where significant differences were age-related, they were included in Part 2 of the findings, with ‘early teens’ meaning 13-16 year olds and ‘late teens’ meaning 17-20 year olds. Where significant differences were related differentially to religious style, they were included in Part 3.

²² SPSS Inc., *SPSS User's Guide* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1988).

²³ Thanissaro, “Heaven”.

*General effects linked with bowing to parents**Publicly vested attitudes*

Table 1. Comparison of publicly-vested values between those bowing or not bowing to parents

	% agree for		χ^2	p<
	No	Yes		
I think it is important to work hard when I get a job	71	89	19.90	.001
Most unemployed people could have a job if they really wanted to	22	63	67.96	.001
I am happy in my school	49	74	25.48	.001
My school is helping me prepare for life	40	70	34.33	.001
I like the people I go to school with	51	77	28.02	.001
It is wrong to smoke cigarettes	43	69	27.28	.001
It is wrong to use marijuana (hash or pot)	30	52	18.18	.001
It is wrong to use heroin	51	78	31.37	.001
The wellbeing of my fellow students/workers is important to me	64	73	4.13	.05
I respect those who are in authority	41	65	23.58	.001
It is important for a child to learn to be independent and self-determined	67	84	15.60	.001
You have to be very careful about trusting people	53	75	21.80	.001
Yates correction applied throughout.				

As shown in Table 1, on the subject of work, those who bowed to their parents were more likely to think it important to work hard when they got a job (89% agreed as compared with 71% of those who didn't bow). Those who bowed were more likely to think unemployed people could have a job if they really wanted to (63% agreed as compared with 22% of those who didn't bow). On the subject of school in general, those who bowed to parents were more likely to be happy at school (74% agreed as compared with 49% of those who didn't bow) and to feel school was preparing them for

life (70% agreed as compared with 40% of those who didn't bow) Those who bowed to parents were more inclined to like the people they went to school with (77% agreed as compared with 51% of those who didn't bow). In terms of substance use, those who bowed to parents were more likely to think it wrong to use tobacco (69%), marijuana (52%) and heroin (78%) than those who didn't bow (43%, 30% and 51% respectively). In terms of collectivism, those who bowed to parents were more likely to lend importance to the wellbeing of their fellow students or workers (73% agreed as compared with 64% of those who didn't bow). In terms of traditionalism, those who bowed to parents were more likely to respect those in authority (65% agreed as compared with 41% of those who didn't bow). In terms of secular-rational values, those who bowed to parents were more likely to think a child should be independent and self-determined (84% agreed as compared with 67% of those who didn't bow). In terms of survival values, those who bowed were more likely to be suspicious about trusting people (75% agreed as compared with 53% of those who didn't bow). The ScAttRE-s score for Buddhist teens bowing to parents ($M_{\text{bowing}}=24.75$, S.D. = 5.07) was significantly more positive than those who did not bow to their parents ($M_{\text{no bowing}}=23.45$, S.D. = 4.71, $t(415)=-2.68$, $p<.01$).

Privately-vested attitudes

Table 2. Comparison of privately-vested attitudes between those bowing or not bowing to parents

	% agree for		χ^2	p<
	No	Yes		
My family are important to me	74	89	15.82	.001
We should keep our aging parents with us at home	29	62	43.78	.001
I am influenced by my family	52	68	10.05	.01
My family are supportive of me	64	82	16.68	.001
I consider myself a proper Buddhist	24	49	24.87	.001
I think Buddhism is the only true religion	16	30	10.70	.01
I believe in life after death	39	61	20.36	.001

Table 2. Comparison of privately-vested attitudes between those bowing or not bowing to parents

Yates correction applied throughout.

As shown in Table 2, in terms of family values, those who bowed to parents were more likely to find their family important (89% agreed as compared with 74% of those who didn't bow) and to want to express filial piety by looking after aging parents (62% agreed as compared with 29% of those who didn't bow). Those who bowed to parents were more likely to be influenced by their family (68% agreed as compared with 52% of those who didn't bow) and to find their family supportive (82% agreed as compared with 64% of those who didn't bow). In terms of religious identity, those who bowed to parents were more likely to consider themselves proper Buddhists (49% agreed as compared with 24% of those who didn't bow) and think Buddhism the only true religion (30% agreed as compared with 16% of those who didn't bow). Those who bowed to parents were more likely to believe in life after death (61% agreed as compared with 39% of those who didn't bow). The TSAB score for those bowing to parents ($M_{\text{bowing}}=98.30$, S.D. = 12.14) indicated an attitude to Buddhism which was significantly more positive than for those who did not bow to their parents ($M_{\text{no bowing}}=93.46$, S.D. = 14.12, $t(355)= -3.68$, $p<.001$).

Bowing-linked attitudes with significant age differences

Early teens

Table 3. Attitude differences between early teens bowing or not bowing to parents

	% agree for		χ^2	p<
	No	Yes		
I find life really worth living	58	74	10.73	.01
A job gives you a sense of purpose	51	67	10.30	.01
The police do a good job	40	51	4.99	.05

Yates correction applied throughout.

As mentioned earlier, Buddhists in their early teens were more likely to bow to parents than those in their late teens. As shown in Table 3, early

teens who bowed to parents were more likely to say they found life worth living (74% agreed as compared with 58% of those who didn't bow) and that a job would give them a sense of purpose (67% agreed as compared with 51% of those who didn't bow). Those who bowed to parents were more likely to think the police did a good job (51% agreed as compared with 40% of those who didn't bow).

Late teens

Table 4. Attitude differences between late teens bowing or not bowing to parents

	% agree for		χ^2	p<
	No	Yes		
I feel my life has a sense of purpose	52	66	7.37	.01
Abortion is never justifiable	16	25	4.85	.05
I would never sign a petition	1	8	11.02	.01
It annoys me when other people perform better than I do	18	29	6.37	.05
I would do what pleases my family, even if I detest that activity	30	48	12.32	.001
Buddhists should look after their parents in their old age	68	81	7.90	.01
My family disapproves of what I do with my spare time	19	32	8.82	.01
It is wrong to get drunk	29	51	19.78	.001
Buddhists should avoid drinking alcohol	40	56	9.89	.01
Yates correction applied throughout.				

Buddhists in their late teens were less likely to bow to parents than those in their early teens. Also as shown in Table 4, late teens who bowed were more likely to say they found their life to have a sense of purpose (66% agreed as compared with 52% of those who didn't bow). In terms of traditionalism, late teens who bowed were more likely to be against abortion (25% agreed as compared with 16% of those who didn't bow). Also in terms of survival values, those who bowed were more reluctant to sign a petition (8%) as compared with 1% who didn't bow. In terms of accepting

hierarchy, those who bowed to parents were more likely to be annoyed by others performing better than them (29% agreed as compared with 18% of those who didn't bow). Those who bowed to parents were more likely to do what pleased their family even if they detested it (48% agreed as compared with 30% of those who didn't bow). Those who bowed to parents were more likely to think Buddhists should look after their parents in their old age (81% agreed as compared with 68% of those who didn't bow). Those who bowed were more likely to find their family disapproved of what they did in their spare time (32% agreed as compared with 19% of those who didn't bow). On the subject of intoxicant use, late teens who bowed were more likely to think it wrong to get drunk (51%) and that Buddhists should avoid drinking alcohol (56%) than Buddhists who did not bow (29% and 40% respectively).

Bowing-linked attitudes with significant religious style differences

Convert Buddhist teens

Table 5. Attitude differences between convert Buddhist teens bowing or not bowing to parents

	% agree for		χ^2	p<
	No	Yes		
I think it is important to learn at least one Asian language	36	68	40.65	.001
I would want to go and live in Asia some day	37	48	4.86	.05
It is important for a child to learn obedience and religious faith	31	72	68.04	.001
I would never sign a petition	1	8	11.02	.01
Doing meditation is sufficient for Buddhist practice	41	56	8.04	.01
I am a religious person	30	53	21.14	.001
Yates correction applied throughout.				

As mentioned earlier, convert Buddhist teens were less likely to bow to parents than heritage teens. Also as shown in Table 5, convert Buddhist teens who bowed to parents were more likely to feel it important to learn an Asian language (68%) and want to go and live in Asia some day (48%)

than those who didn't bow (36% and 37% respectively). In terms of traditionalism, those who bowed to parents were more likely lend importance to a child learning obedience and religious faith (72% agreed as compared with 31% of those who didn't bow). In terms of survival values, those who bowed to parents were more likely to say they would never sign a petition (8% as compared with 1% of those who didn't bow). Those who bowed were more likely to think meditation sufficient as a Buddhist practice (56% agreed as compared with 41% of those who didn't bow). Those who bowed were more likely to consider themselves a religious person (53% agreed as compared with 30% of those who didn't bow). For convert Buddhist teens, the TSAB score for those bowing to parents ($M_{\text{bowing}}=99.92$, S.D. = 15.06) was significantly more positive than for other convert Buddhist teens who did not bow to their parents ($M_{\text{no bowing}}=92.56$, S.D. = 14.96, $t(144)= 2.31$, $p<.05$).

Heritage Buddhist teens

Table 6. Attitude differences between heritage Buddhist teens bowing or not bowing to parents

	% agree for		χ^2	p<
	No	Yes		
I have a strong sense of national pride	27	48	17.11	.001
I want my children to grow up to be Buddhist	32	60	31.35	.001
Yates correction applied throughout.				

Heritage Buddhist teens were more likely to bow to parents than convert teens. Also as shown in Table 6, heritage Buddhists who bowed to parents were more likely to feel a strong sense of national pride (48% agreed as compared with 27% of those who didn't bow). In terms of 'perpetuating structures', those who bowed to parents were more likely to want their children to grow up to be Buddhist (60% agreed as compared with 32% of those who didn't bow). For heritage Buddhist teens, the TSAB score for those bowing to parents ($M_{\text{bowing}}=98.29$, S.D. = 11.70) was not significantly more positive than for heritage Buddhist teens who did not bow to their parents ($M_{\text{no bowing}}=94.66$, S.D. = 12.28, $t(224)= 1.87$, N.S.).

DISCUSSION

Extent to which home tradition crosses the border into the public domain

Although some of the attitudes corresponding with bowing to parents seemed to remain in the sphere of religion and family (e.g. caring for parents in old age and positive attitude towards Buddhism) there were also many attitudes concerning public domain decision-making to which bowing to parents corresponded significantly – whether it be work ethic, contentment with school, positive attitude towards classroom RE and resilience to intoxicant use – attitudes which undoubtedly would have public-world consequences. It would therefore be justified to recognize bowing to parents as a religious practice that exists not only in the privacy of the family, but which has three distinct functions over and above this – as a force for religiously-defined good in society, helping bind Buddhists together as a collective and acting as a perpetuating structure for passing religious values to a future generation. More privately-held attitudes that also corresponded with bowing to parents included thinking their family important, influential in their lives and supportive. They were more likely to consider themselves a proper Buddhist and Buddhism to be the only true religion. They were more likely to believe in life after death and have a positive attitude towards Buddhism. In conclusion, the religiosity that straddles the notional border between private home practice and the public sphere is demonstrably the affective religious-led attitudes and consequences of collectivism to Buddhist ingroup thinking, rather than physical attributes like dress style and that teenager' attitudes such as collectivism and traditionalism straddle the categories of private- and public-domain religion. It is hoped that such observations amongst Buddhists will lead to the search for crossovers between home and public practice in other religions, helping religious educators to contextualize their teachings better to their pupils' home situation.

Divesting Buddhism of cultural accretions belittles implicit religion

Outside the major remit of this article, it also became obvious that bowing to parents is an important part of implicit²⁴ religion for Buddhists

²⁴ Religious practice embedded in the fabric of everyday routine.

– certainly to the point that it corresponds with a significantly more positive attitude towards Buddhism (at present the most secure predictor for Buddhist religiosity) for teenagers of all ages and converts. To ignore bowing to parents simply because it seems to be a cultural accretion would be to dismiss what self-identifying Buddhists consider an important part of their own identity. Since the nature of Buddhism, like other Dharmic religions, is not bounded with strict definitions of a personal God or limited to certain religious rituals, bowing to parents is important because religious learning is part of socialization in the home.

The nurture ‘function’ of bowing to parents for Buddhists

Rather than trying to make an artificial division between ‘religion’ and ‘culture’, a more instructive way forward for Buddhist research might involve conceiving culture not as a system of symbols and meanings, but as a diverse collection of tools, with different intended purposes – cultural elements which can then be deployed as variables to elucidate the purpose of such religious/cultural elements bowing to parents.²⁵ In terms of values transmission, bowing to parents would be expected to help increase the power distance of the parents reducing a tendency towards individuality – but considering the parents are not supposed merely to *impose* themselves on their children, but also exemplify good deeds to their children, incorporating the retelling of these good deeds to their children as part of the act of blessing them, it may be that the way this activity awakens virtue in the child’s heart is more gentle than it might appear at a first glance. It seems to bring with it a sense of being a religious person (rather than a spiritual person) and of being a proper Buddhist. If it is true that bowing brings Buddhist ethos into the home, the effect is likely to be most noticeable for convert Buddhists. The act of bowing seems to nurture early and late teens differently. For Buddhists in their early teens, bowing was particularly linked with an increased sense of purpose and worth in life and positive attitude towards the police. For Buddhists in their late teens, bowing was by contrast linked with more traditional values, acceptance

²⁵ As suggested by William H. Sewell, “The Concept(s) of Culture” – *Beyond the cultural turn: New directions in the study of society and culture*. Eds. Victoria E. Bonnell and Lynn Hunt (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), 45-46.

of hierarchy and being on the receiving end of more adult interference in their spare-time pursuits.

The collectivist role of bowing to parents

Bowing's function also changed depending on religious style. For convert Buddhist teens, bowing was particularly linked with alignment to Asian values, traditional and survival values and feeling more of a religious person. By contrast, the bowing of heritage Buddhist teens was linked more with ingroup mentality such as national pride and wanting their children to grow up Buddhist. It is ironic to find that although a higher percentage of heritage Buddhists practised bowing to parents, the practice did not seem to link with more positive TSAB scores – and it may be the case that religiosity is perpetuated more by other structures such as having a home shrine rather than the bowing – and that bowing has taken on a more ingroup/collectivist role amongst heritage Buddhists than for convert Buddhists. It can be concluded that bowing to parents may have a particularly Deleuzian function for late teens and heritage Buddhist teens.

Religion-specific aspects of bowing to parents

The attitudes of Buddhists who bowed had similarities and differences with bowing-related attitudes in non-Buddhists. Both Buddhists and non-Buddhists who bowed shared rejection of intoxicant substance use. A difference for Buddhists was for bowing to be linked with the wish to look after parents in old age, whereas for non-Buddhists the opposite was the case – bowing to parents linked with being less inclined to look after parents in their old age. In conclusion, bowing to parents does seem to make a difference to being a Buddhist – and could usefully be considered an individual difference for further research on Buddhist religiosity.²⁶

²⁶ Lack of space did not allow detailed examination of friendship in this article, but data collected showed bowing to parents additionally seemed to correspond with friendship-orientation in the Buddhist teens. Those who bowed were more likely to seek out same-sex friends (presumably not romantic association) who were also Buddhist and found it helpful to talk about their problems with them. This may have been a strategy for instilling themselves with worldview elements of Buddhist religiosity unavailable directly from their parents.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Revd. Canon Prof. Leslie J. Francis (University of Warwick) and Dr. Mandy Robbins (Glyndŵr University) for supervision of this research and to St. Mary's RE Centre for hosting the online version of the survey used in this study, on its website. Thanks for constructive criticism received at an earlier presentation of this paper at the Warwick Centre for Education Studies Interdisciplinary Conference on 10 May 2015 and for review of a sister paper at the Nordic Conference on Religious Education between 15-18 June 2015 at Tartu, Estonia where suggestions made were also incorporated into this paper.