

MANZANAR WAR RELOCATION CENTER
MANZANAR, CALIFORNIA

January 4, 1944

MEMORANDUM BY: RALPH P. MERRITT, Project Director

SUBJECT: Further conference with Rev. ^{Shigeo} Nagatomi
of the Manzanar Buddhist Church

The record of the meeting between Rev. Nagatomi and the leave clearance board, dated November 23, 1943, and recommendation for leave clearance dated December 6th, came before me for review and concurrence. Before taking final action I called Rev. Nagatomi to my office today. With the aid of an interpreter we talked for 1½ hours. During the discussion I covered the points of the attitude of Rev. Nagatomi toward relocation, his views on the nationalistic influences of the Buddhist Church, and the question of my decision on the matter of leave clearance for him.

In the outset of the conversation, and in response to direct questions, Rev. Nagatomi indicated that he was an alien, educated in the Buddhist Church in Japan, and by right of inheritance and custom he had within the last few years inherited, at the death of his father, a Buddhist Temple in Japan and he intended to return to that temple as soon as possible after the war but that during the time he might remain in this country he swore he would obey the laws of this country and to help in improving the American point of view of persons of Japanese ancestry.

This man is an internationalist in the sense of apparently having no dominating nationalistic motives either for Japan or for America, but believing in the idea that everyone should be a Buddhist and that Buddhism would take hold and thrive in the country in proportion as its adherents were "good citizens" of the country in which they were living. He said that in India a person must live a good life as a resident of India if he were to be a good Buddhist and similarly in Japan a person should be a good Japanese and a good Buddhist, and that the same applied for people of Buddhist faith living in America.

Throughout his talk it developed that he is concerned about the future of people of Japanese ancestry who are in Manzanar as Buddhists. If they went out to relocate in a place like Ogden where there is an active Buddhist church he felt that relocation was justified because the person would not fall away from his faith by lack of contact. If, however, the plan was to spread people of Japanese ancestry very thin and very widely over the Middle West and Eastern parts of the country

and Buddhists were to relocate in places where there were not enough people to form a Buddhist Church or to support a Buddhist minister they would lose contact with the church and therefore their souls would be lost and he was opposed to that kind of relocation.

This point is of the greatest importance since the majority of Japanese people holding any religious faith are Buddhist and since the point of view will undoubtedly have a vital bearing on the ultimate developments in relocation it is easily understood that Rev. Nagatomi and others of his faith may conscientiously and properly oppose the plan of relocation for all persons except the few who go to certain large cities. It was clear that this attitude may not be disloyal to the United States but solely an attitude of self-preservation. The question arises then whether a law abiding alien, who will not go out to relocate himself, should be permitted to remain in the relocation center to become the chief obstacle to relocation. This point also brings out the further question as to whether the WRA relocation policy has considered the necessity for spiritual security as well as of material and personal security for those whom it would relocate and whether the arbitrary action of removing a religious leader from a center because of opinions such as have been expressed by Rev. Nagatomi would be justified by the resulting disintegration of the religious beliefs of as important a group as Buddhists or of any group.

It is very clear to me that if Rev. Nagatomi is granted leave clearance he will remain in Manzanar or in some other center and does not intend to take advantage of leave clearance. Consideration might be given to the alternative of sending Rev. Nagatomi to Tule Lake or having him agree to the plan of relocation at some point in the Middle West to which he might draw his followers.

I have already referred to the expression given by Rev. Nagatomi that a Buddhist should be a good citizen of the country where he lives and that he should live an upright and religious life as a citizen of that country. While frankly he admits cultural and religious relationships with Japan, he vigorously pointed out that he not only would obey the laws of the United States but that he would be glad to support the plan of relocation provided it did not imply by severance a breakdown in the religious faith of relocating Buddhists. In the sect to which Rev. Nagatomi belongs there is no Emperor worship nor apparently any other Japanese loyalty other than reference to the Japanese calendar and complete compliance with Japanese cultural proceedings. Rev. Nagatomi explained in considerable detail that the Buddhist church in its desire that its members should be good citizens in the country in which they lived have prepared a plan for young American citizens of Japanese ancestry to have theological training in the Buddhist faith in Japan and return to this country as citizens so that in due time they might establish a theological school in United States which would no longer require contact with Japan in order to maintain the religious philosophies of Buddhism. He named three young priests who had returned

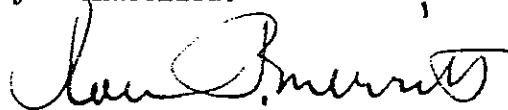
from Japan as American citizens as the forerunners of this program which now has been stopped because of the war. If this is a correct interpretation of Rev. Nagatomi's religious views there is nothing in those views which in themselves should restrict his privileges as a law abiding alien. On the contrary, his views contain a constructive plan for eventually divorcing the Buddhist priests from Japanese cultural domination.

We come then to the final point of the recommendation and decision by the Project Director on leave clearance for Rev. Nagatomi. There is no question in my mind but that the Rev. Nagatomi is a law abiding alien and there is no question but what he will be pro-American to the extent in which he believes that such American proposals as relocation may be carried on without a severance of the contact by the Buddhist and their church, which in his mind is the most vital issue, ~~for the religious concept~~. It may not be that in a case of this kind the issue is between relocation and Tule Lake. In a famous law case a great lawyer once said, "for the peace of the world many of the most important issues should never have been decided".

I believe that to force Rev. Nagatomi to go to Tule Lake would in no way be justified if leave clearance is granted to law abiding aliens and I believe that to leave Rev. Nagatomi in Manzanar to obstruct relocation might be a most serious obstacle to the relocation program. Enforced relocation would not be practical or satisfactory unless it was worked out on mutually agreed grounds.

Pending development of a relocation program that considers the spiritual security of those who are relocated, and pending the development of many other phases of the present problem, I recommend that in the case of Rev. Nagatomi he be permitted to remain in Manzanar and the matter of leave clearance be deferred.

Deferral has heretofore been used in only the cases where a breather period is given for education for citizens. This is the only deferral that has been recommended for an alien. The justification of this deferral is that the reason for deferral does not arise for the alien but does arise from the fact that the future of Manzanar and the future plans of relocation are both as yet undecided.



RALPH P. MERRITT
Project Director