

THE PROCESS OF DECENTERING:  
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF ASIAN AMERICAN BUDDHISTS  
FROM THE FO GUAN SHAN TEMPLE BUDDHIST ORDER

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ABSTRACT

The current study is an empirical exploration of the Buddhist phenomenon of decentering (letting go of the ego as described in the **Four Noble Truths**). The researcher explored decentering as a **personal process** of being open to **change** in one's **daily Buddhist practice**, whereby a person learns to be **less attached** to **worldly experiences**, hence reducing suffering that comes with a conditioned mind. A psychological approach underscored by empirical and transcendental phenomenologies was utilized to describe the essence of decentering: 1) criterion sampling to select 6 members of a Buddhist temple in Southwestern United States, 2) in-depth interviewing, and 3) phenomenologically-grounded data analytic techniques. Results showed the process of decentering is a multifaceted experience. It paralleled millennia-old Buddhist training guidelines for achieving decentering: 3-fold training of morality, meditation and wisdom. Conation was an essential component that pervaded the entire process of decentering. Participants gradually reshaped their habitual schema to spiritual schema. Conation served to drive decentering's mechanism of change, metacognition. Participants focused on changing the way they related to their thoughts over time rather than changing the contents of their thoughts. The pursuit of mental well-being through the use of decentering-related interventions has far-reaching implications for clinical research, training and practice.