Published by The Chinese University Press

《人間佛教研究》第三期（2012）
International Journal for the Study of Humanistic Buddhism, Issue 3 (2012), 19–38

Theravāda Teachings and Buddhist Meditation Training in Hong Kong

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Abstract

As a result of the unique social and geopolitical position of Hong Kong, Buddhism in the former British colony since the early 20th century has gone on a course different from its Mainland counterpart. The favorable environment in Hong Kong also catapulted Hong Kong Buddhism to the forefront of some of the latest developments in Chinese Buddhism or Buddhism within the Chinese societies. The rapid development of Theravāda Buddhism in Hong Kong since the 1990s is one of the latest of such developments and its continual impact to both local Buddhism as well as the Mahāyāna-dominated Chinese society at large will require proper evaluation.

Keywords: Hong Kong, Theravāda Buddhism, Chinese Buddhism, meditation

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An earlier draft of this paper was presented at the Third World Buddhist Forum, 26th April, 2012, Hong Kong, at the invitation of Organization Committee of the Third World Buddhist Forum. I thank Professor C. F. Lee and Venerable Hin Hung for their support during my sojourn at the Centre of Buddhist Studies of the University of Hong Kong, where much of the research related to this paper was conducted.

Introduction

"[…R]evitalization of faith and practice among laymen, sparked by a few really able monks, whose talents stand in all the greater contrast to those of most of their brethren." [1]—Such is how Buddhism in Hong Kong was characterized by Holmes Welch in 1961. Half a century has past since then, and some of Welch's observations still apply—Buddhism in Hong Kong fits into the "pattern of Chinese Buddhism as a whole over the past hundred years," namely, the rise of Buddhist laymen and their organizations, in contrast to the overall qualitative and quantitative decline of the monastics.

At that time, however, Welch could not foresee the drastic political and social changes soon unfolded in Hong Kong and Mainland China, leading Buddhism in the two territories onto very different courses. In this paper, my focus will be on the development of Theravāda Buddhism in Hong Kong as an example of how Buddhism has developed in a new direction in the former British colony and what such development entails in terms of the opportunities and challenges which await Buddhism in Hong Kong in the future decades.

Background

Buddhism in Hong Kong and China

While Buddhism had a long history in Hong Kong dating back to possibly the 5th century, Buddhism as a definite form of faith was confined only to a handful of monasteries scattered across the rural areas of Hong Kong up to the early 20th century.[2] Starting from the late 1910s, the Chinese Buddhist revival brought about by Yang Wenhui楊文

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1 Holmes Welch, "Buddhist Organizations in Hong Kong," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society Hong Kong Branch* 1 (1961): 99.

2 For early history of Buddhism in Hong Kong, see Wing Ming 永明, *Xianggang fojiao yu fosi*香港佛教與佛寺 (香港: 香港大嶼山寶蓮禪寺, 1993), 1–46; Deng Jiazhou 鄧家宙, *Ershi shiji zhi xianggang fojiao*《二十世紀之香港佛教》, 3rd ed. (Hong Kong: 香港史學會, 2010), 1–16.

會(1837–1911), Taixu 太虛(1890–1947) and their supporters,[3] inspired similar development in Hong Kong, most notably with the founding of a handful of lay-oriented Buddhist organizations in the city area.[4] As a result of the colonial government's laissez-faire policy toward local culture and religions, and the relative stability of the territory up to the Japanese invasion in 1941, Buddhism in Hong Kong continued to prosper in various ways. The development of Buddhism in Hong Kong was unrivalled in the rest of China in terms of speed, size and continuity, as the colony saw a continuous influx of immigrants and refugees who fled from the neighboring Guangdong province, as well as the rest of China, most notably Shanghai. Besides the lay-oriented Buddhist groups whose activities consisted mostly of exegeses of Buddhist sutras, chanting and Buddhist rites, there was a proliferation of vegetarian restaurants and Buddhist bookshops where Buddhist texts circulated freely, free schools,[5] Buddhist publishers, Buddhist charity organizations,

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[3] On Buddhist revival in modern China since late 19th century, see Holmes Welch, *The Buddhist Revival in China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968). The word "revival" here does not necessarily imply that Chinese Buddhism was "in a state of hopeless collapse," as "moral and spiritual decadence," and Chinese clergy as "notoriously ignorant and corrupt" as authors such as A. H Smith, Kenneth Ch'en or Chan Wing-Tsit did in their description of Chinese Buddhism. For discussion see ibid., 1–2, and also of the same author, The *Practice of Chinese Buddhism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 408. I have adopted Welch's definition of the revival in the sense of simply a conscious attempt to modernize and reform the existing Buddhism to cater to contemporary political and social needs.

[4] Like most Buddhist organizations, these groups have no major proselytizing agenda, aiming mostly at educating the public about Buddhism through traditional lectures on Buddhist texts. Among the first such groups are the *Xianggang fojiao jiangjing hui* 香港佛教講經會 (1916) (sometimes abbreviated as *Foxuehui* 佛學會 or *Jiangjinghui* 講經會) and *Jileyuan* 極樂院 (1918), both founded by lay Buddhists. See Deng, *Ershi shiji zhi xiaogang fojiao*, 40.

[5] Gao Yongxiao 高永霄, "Cong diaonian cixiang fashi de yuanshi 一 tan xianggang fojiao yixue de shizhong"〈從悼念慈祥法師的示寂——談香港佛教義學的始

large-scaled public Buddhist rites, Buddhist marriage ceremonies and Buddhist entertainment such as music and movies.[6] Chinese Esoteric Buddhism was reintroduced to China by Japanese Shingon monks in the 1920s and was established in Hong Kong soon after. The flourish of Buddhist activities put Hong Kong at the forefront of the Chinese Buddhist world, in contrast to Mainland China where Buddhist activities had been severely disrupted.[7]

After a brief flourish of Japanese Buddhism during the Japanese occupation (1941–1945), immediately prior to the founding of PRC in 1949, Hong Kong saw another major influx of Chinese monastics who escaped communism to seek shelter in the British colony. With the injection of such new force, Buddhism in Hong Kong quickly resumed its role in society, particularly in the fields of education and charity. Once again, thanks to the unique stability of Hong Kong in the region, Buddhism in Hong Kong continued to see a number of far-sighted innovations such the founding of the Buddhist Association of Hong Kong (香港佛教聯合會, 1946),[8] the establishment of a number of highly active Buddhist youth organizations,[9] the first Chinese Buddhist summer camp for youths (1960),[10] the first "Chinese Buddhist Bible,"

終〉, *Buddhist in Hong Kong*《香港佛教》476 (1999), accessed March 3, 2012, http://www.hkbuddhist.org/magazine/476/476_11.html.

6 Deng, *Ershi shiji zhi Xianggang fojiao*, 40–54.

7 For discussion of the role of Buddhism in China prior to 1945, in particular, during the Japanese invasion, see Xue Yu, *Buddhism, War, and Nationalism: Chinese Monks in the Struggle Against Japanese Aggressions, 1931-1945*, (New York: Routledge, 2005).

8 The Association was formed by local Buddhists immediately after the surrender of Japan was declared on 15 August 1945, to take over the property of Higashi Hongan-ji東本願寺 from the Japanese monk-cum-military command chief Utsuki Nishū 宇津木二秀(1903–1951) to turn it into a free school—*Zhonghua fojiao yixue* 中華佛教義學. See Deng, *Ershi shiji zhi xiaogang fojiao*, 60.

9 Deng, *Ershi shiji zhi xiaogang fojiao*, (2008 ed.), 121–122.

10 Organized by the native Hongkonger Shi Xiaoyun釋曉雲(遊雲山) who later left

(1961),[11] the proposal to make Vesak (Buddha's Birthday) a public holiday (1961),[12] the first modern, multidisciplinary Chinese Buddhist college (1969),[13] and the first Chinese Mahāyāna novitiate program (1971). These examples are heralded as major innovations in Chinese Buddhism—all made possible as a result of the unique position of Hong Kong, unlike the Mainland or even Taiwan before the martial law was officially lifted in 1987.

Starting from the 1970s, despite the continuous growth of Buddhism and its influence in the Hong Kong society, with the past generation of monastics of the postwar boom either passing away or moving on to other cities or countries, Buddhism in Hong Kong saw a decline of vitality and creativity which marked the past decades and fell back to the earlier trajectory of Chinese Buddhist revival—namely, continual decline of local monastics and rapid expansion of the local laity as Welch rightly observed. Starting in the 1980s, however, foreign-based Buddhist groups, in particular, Tibetan Buddhist societies and Chinese Buddhist groups from Taiwan began to establish themselves in Hong Kong, enriching the local Buddhist scene with new faces of how Buddhism may look in the contemporary society. In the 1990s, Theravāda Buddhism was introduced to the Hong Kong public and Theravāda meditation practices soon became highly popular with at least six centers of different affiliations established within the past two decades.

To sum up, Buddhism in Hong Kong underwent a drastically different course of development when compared to its Mainland counterpart. Buddhism experienced unprecedented growth during the prewar era and especially the postwar eras due to various social and

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for Taiwan. See *Yuanquan* 原泉 46, *Buddhist in Hong Kong*《香港佛教》1963 (40), cited in Deng, *Ershi shiji zhi xiaogang fojiao*, (2008 ed.), 122–123.

[11] Published by Luo Shixian 羅時憲 and other lay Buddhists in Hong Kong. Unfortunately, the work *The Selected Buddhist Scriptures*《佛經選要》remains poorly circulated.

[12] Proposed to the government by the Hong Kong Chinese Buddhist Association. This was realized eventually in 1999, two years after the handover of Hong Kong to PRC. See discussion in Deng, *Ershi shiji zhi xiaogang fojiao*, (2008 ed.), 109.

[13] Hong Kong Buddhist College 能仁書院.

political factors.[14] As a result, the percentage of Buddhist population in Hong Kong is considered somewhat higher than in the Mainland, estimated to be 2.5–4.2 millions in number.

Region	Population (millions)[15]	Percentage of Buddhist[16]	Number of Buddhists (millions)
China (PRC)	1338.1	20.0[17]–50.0	267.6–669.1
Hong Kong (SAR)	7.0	35.0[18]–66.0	2.5–4.2
Taiwan	23.2	23.9[19]–70.4	5.5–16.3
Total	1368.3	20.0–50.0	276.6–689.6

Fig.1: Estimated number of Hong Kong Buddhist population in comparison with those of Mainland China and Taiwan (2010).

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[14] This is in contrast to Buddhism in Mainland China since 1949 which has been described to be falling into three stages, namely, integration, destruction and revival. See Mingshan茗山, "Biange, enan, fuxing: zhongguo fojiao sanshi nian"〈變革．厄難．復興：中國佛教三十年〉, in *Mingshan wenxuan*《茗山文選》(Nanjing: Jingling Kejing Chu, 1983). See discussion also in Ji Zhe汲喆, "Fuxing sanshi nian: dangdai zhongguo fojiao de jiben shuju"〈復興三十年：當代中國佛教的基本數據〉, *Fojiao guancha*《佛教觀察》, 5 (2009): 8–15. See also Chen Bing, 陳兵 and Deng Zimei鄧子美, *Ershi shiji zhongguo fojiao*《二十世紀中國佛教》(Beijing: Minzu Chunbanshe, 2000), 56–58.

[15] "2010 World Population Data Sheet," Population Reference Bureau, Washington D.C.

[16] Estimated figures from Patrick Johnstone's *Operation World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993) with exceptions highlighted individually, quoted in Alex Smith, "Counting the Buddhist World Fairly," in *Sharing Jesus holistically with the Buddhist World*, ed. David Lim and Steven Spaulding. (Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library, 2005), 8–10, with an insightful discussion on the definition of "Buddhist" as compared to "Christian."

[17] Ji Zhe, "Fuxing sanshi nian: dangdai zhongguo fojiao de jiben shuju," 8–10.

[18] "International Religious Freedom Report 2003," Figure for overall number of people with some form of religious practice excluding Christians and Muslims. http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2003/23826.htm, accessed December 10, 2011.

[19] "International Religious Freedom Report 2003." http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2003/23825.htm.

Theravāda Buddhism in Chinese Societies

Theravāda Buddhism has an indigenous presence in southwestern China dated back as early as the 7th century, and in its present form, closely connected with the form of Buddhism practiced in the neighboring Thailand and Myanmar dated from the 12th century.[20] In the contemporary Chinese context, the values of Theravāda Buddhism were well recognized by the Buddhist reformers such as Yang Wenhui and Taixu, who saw the doctrine and practice of Theravāda Buddhism as a catalyst to the reform of Chinese Buddhism. Exchanges between Chinese and Theravāda Buddhists, though not always a smooth one, continued throughout the 20th century as Chinese Buddhists in the Mainland were keen to show their governments the unique diplomatic role Buddhism can play. This is in contrast to Buddhism in Hong Kong where such high-level exchange is unknown.

Starting from the 1970s, with the growing interest in Buddhist meditation practices around the world, eminent teachers such as Mahasi Sayadaw, S. N. Goenka of Myanmar and Ajahn Chah of Thailand, esteemed for their knowledge on meditation, were introduced to the West. Subsequently, meditation centers of the Theravāda vipassanā tradition were established all over the world. By the 1980s, a globalized form of Theravāda Buddhism, with often emphasis on the meditation practice entered Taiwan and Hong Kong, and eventually Mainland China. Besides a growing number of Theravāda temples across China, though constrained by government policies and rivalry of the dominant Mahāyāna sects, lay as well as non-denominational Theravāda study and meditation centers were established in almost all major Chinese cities at an unprecedented rate.

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[20] See Wang Haitao 王海濤, *Yunnan Fojiao Shi*《雲南佛教史》(Kunming: 雲南美術出版社,2001), 388. Major academic studies and survey on Theravāda Buddhism in China in English, see Thomas Adams Borchert, "Educating Monks: Buddhism, Politics and Freedom of Religion on China's Southwest Border," (PhD diss, Chicago: University of Chicago, 2006).

Theravāda Buddhism in Hong Kong

History

As with the rest of China where Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism dominates, full-fledged Theravāda Buddhism had practically no presence in Hong Kong. Theravāda Buddhism was practiced by the Thai migrant community which began to emerge in the 1970s. Subsequently, four Theravāda temples and one Theravāda Center of Thai tradition were founded between the 1980s and 1990s in Hong Kong.[21] These temples are all affiliated with a home temple in Thailand, managed by Thai monks together with supports from locals, and located mostly in the rural areas, serving the local Thai communities as a place of worship.

Starting from the 1990s, a continuously growing number of vipassanā meditation centers have been established across the city (Fig. 2). As stipulated by the local laws, these centers may freely establish themselves and operate as either company or registered society under the Companies Ordinance and Societies Ordinance respectively.[22] Besides regular meetings such as Sunday meditation or reading groups, these centers run also a variety of activities including longer meditation retreats which last from a few days to a few weeks.

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[21] i) Wat Buddhadhamaramin Hung Shui Kiu, Yuen Long; ii) Wat Buddhadhamaram affiliate in Pak Nai, Yuen Long; iii) Wat Dhammaram 大棠寺 in Tai Long, Yuen Long; iv) Wat Mekadhamwanaram (aka Wat Tai Wo 太和寺) in Tai Po. The Dharmakaya Center, located in an apartment of a building in Wanchai may be seen as a hybrid form of a temple in a place where the construction of a temple is impossible.

[22] In many cases, these organizations receive also charity status and are thus tax-exempted.

Organization Name	Location	Lineage [original founder]	Date (official)
Dharma Garden (HK) 香港聞思修佛法中心[23]	Dharma Garden (You Tam Mei Village 攸潭尾村)	Jhayanacara 淨法比丘(Thai)	1990s (?)
Association of Spiritual Friends of Godwin 葛榮禪修同學會[24]	Lotus Centre迴瀾 (Tei Tong Tsai 地塘仔)	Godwin (Sri Lankan)	1995 (2001)
Cultural Department of Chilin Nunnery 志蓮淨苑文化部[25]	Diamond Hill 鑽石山	Siu Sik Kau 蕭式球 (Chinese) [Godwin (Sri Lanka)]	1996
Theravāda Meditation Society 香港南傳禪修學會[26]	Tsim Sha Tsui 尖沙嘴	Ajahn Samahito 文比丘 (Thai) [Ajahn Chah]	1997 (2001)
Vipassanā Meditation Center, Hong Kong 香港內觀靜坐中心[27]	HK Dhamma House (Hang Tau, Sheung Shui上水坑頭) and other locations	Goenka (Burmese) [U Ba Kin]	1998 (2000)
Hong Kong Insight Meditation Society 香港慧觀禪修會[28]	Fa Hong Monastery 法航精舍 (Tei Tong Tsai地塘)	Mahasi (Burmese)	2005

Fig. 2: Current Theravāda Centers in Hong Kong (2012)

[23] http://www.dhammagarden.org

[24] http://www.godwin.org.hk/

[25] http://www.chilin.edu.hk/edu/work_professor_detail.asp?id=17

[26] http://www.hktheravada.org

[27] http://www.hk.dhamma.org

[28] http://hkims.org

Organizations and Activities

Besides the Thai temples which serve mostly the Thai population in Hong Kong, Theravāda Buddhism is presented to the Hong Kong public through a variety of activities run by organizations of different affiliations. Among the first Theravāda monks who offered teachings to the Hong Kong public was U Vinaya, a follower of the teachings of the Burmese monk Sunlun Sayadaw (1878–1952) who was invited to Hong Kong in 1987.[29] At present, six local organizations are devoted to the dissemination of Theravāda Buddhism (Fig. 2). A common characteristic of these groups is the emphasis on the teaching and practice of meditation, which are not readily or at all available in the local Chinese temples or other non-Theravāda Buddhist organizations.

Operation

The Theravāda Buddhist organizations of Hong Kong may be classified into one of following three categories in terms of their mode of operation: i) monastic; ii) monastic-laic; iii) laic. Unlike the Chinese counterparts, these organizations have no local history and their lay members need to be actively involved in the operation of the organizations, deciding among themselves the kind of setup best suiting them, resulting thus patterns unseen within the orthodox local Buddhist organizations.

Monastic

Traditionally Buddhist monasteries regardless of lineage and tradition are inhabited and run by full-time monks, supported by lay followers;[30] the monks reciprocate by giving teachings (*dhamma* talks) but are

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[29] 《宣隆內觀禪修法》，緬甸維那耶大師等著，香港宣隆禪修組編譯（香港：香港宣隆禪修組，2000）。Accessed March 31, 2012. http://www.sunlun.com/smmc.html.

[30] Technically, by monastics including nuns. However, the lineage of nuns (*bhikkhunī-s*) in the Theravāda tradition became extinct some time before the 13th century. There has been attempts to reintroduce ordination of Theravāda nuns in the 20th century, though it is not universally recognized by the *saṃgha.*

otherwise preoccupied in their own religious practices including the study of Buddhist texts and meditation. The four Thai temples and one Thai Buddhist center are all presided by one or more monks from Thailand, operating thus in the aforementioned pattern. The only Theravāda organization run in this manner but accessible to the Hong Kong public is the Dharma Garden, found by a local Chinese Theravāda monk following the Thai tradition in the early 1990s and is managed mainly by the monk himself with a few lay supporters. The center has two missions: to distribute Theravāda or general Buddhist books to the Chinese public on a donation basis; and to provide meditation training to interested parties. Retreats guided by monastics invited from the Thai and Burmese traditions are organized on an irregular basis.

Monastic-laic

One Theravāda organization in Hong Kong is jointly run by the monastics and the laity, namely, the Theravāda Meditation Society, founded by local Chinese followers in 1997 and headed by a Theravāda monk from Malaysia. The lay members of the society are responsible for overall administration and operation of the premise of the society, located in the heart of the city; the monk until his passing away in 2011 resided in the premise, giving *dhamma* talks, teachings on meditation, as well as providing guidance to the members concerning the operation of the group. Through the dynamic interaction between the monk and his layfollowers (unlike the monastic set-up where the lay followers participate by and large passively), the group published books, organized events such as visits to overseas temples and novitiate programs (see below). At present, there is no resident monk for the society but meditation groups are still conducted weekly. Other events such commemoration retreats are organized on an irregular basis.

One of the main motivations for this type of joint monastic-laic operation is to relieve the monastics of the mundane affairs, and in particular from the Theravāda perspective, to allow the monastics to live a pure life according to the *vinaya* which prohibits a variety of mundane activities including material possessions, although the *vinaya* has been

reformed and is no longer strictly observed in Chinese Buddhism.[31]

Laic

Four Theravāda organizations are managed completely by lay Buddhists without direct participation of the monastics.

The Association of Spiritual Friends of Godwin was founded officially by a group of local Buddhists in 2011 after Godwin Samaratne (1932–2000), the lay meditation teacher from Sri Lank, visited and conducted retreats in Hong Kong starting from 1995. At present, classes on meditation, weekly meditation sitting, yoga classes, as well as longer retreats are organized by members of the association themselves in the association's main premise in Lantau Island as well as other locations across the city.

The Cultural Department of Chilin Nunnery has been offering courses on Theravāda Buddhism and Theravāda meditation since 1996, and also Pali classes and Pali-Chinese sutta translation guided by the Sri Lankan monk Professor Kakkapalliye Anuruddha since 1998. Although neither the Chilin Nunnery nor its Cultural Department which runs various education programs is devoted to Theravāda Buddhism, its Theravāda programs attracted the greatest numbers of participants, both regular and irregular. Meditation gatherings are conducted several times per week with the attendance of consistently over 200, constrained only by the size of the hall. These gatherings, conducted by a former local student of Godwin who was conversant also in Chinese Buddhism, consisted of a brief lecture, followed by sitting and walking meditation.

The Hong Kong branch of Vipassanā Meditation Center was set up in 1998, registered officially in 2000. After its Indian-Burmese founder

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[31] The issues of monastic possession of properties and wealth have been a vexing and contentious one within the Chinese society since the early 20th century. Some Chinese monasteries and temples in Hong Kong had made attempts to rid themselves of the accusation of unlawful (according to the Buddhist precepts) personal or hereditary possession by setting up incorporated management committees or introducing joint monastic-laic setups not unlike the one described here.

Satya Narayan Goenka (1924–) visited Hong Kong in 1999, the current premise in Sheung Shui with the capacity of 50 was set up. Since then regular meditation courses ranging from one day to twenty days have been offered to the public, with the ten-day program considered the prerequisite for all advanced courses. The meditation courses are guided by teachers appointed by the Headquarter of the organization in India. As the focus of the Center is the practice of "universal teachings of the Buddha" which happens to be in the form of Theravāda teaching of Burmese lineage, teachings on Theravāda Buddhism per se are minimal. The Center is run by a committee of local members who does not identify itself to the public as "Buddhist." As such, these programs attract also a large number of non-Buddhist participants. As of 2012, around 18 to 20 courses are organized per year. In addition, the Hong Kong members were responsible for establishing and running similar centers in Mainland China under the directives of the Headquarter.[32] Theplan for the building of a new center, Dhamma Mutta, with the capacity for 150 persons, located in Lantau Island at the estimated cost of HKD 64,370,000, began in 2008 and is targeted to be complete by 2013.

The Hong Kong Insight Meditation Society, founded officially in 2005, was the offspring of the Hong Kong Satipatthana Centre (founded in 1990s) which no longer exists. Currently, the society conducts regular meditation gatherings and retreats in its main premise in Lantau Island, as well as other locations within the city. While most of the programsare organized by a lay member of the group who follows the teaching of Mahasi Sayadaw (1904–982) of the Burmese lineage, monks of other Theravāda lineages have also been invited to lead meditation retreats.

It should be noted that lay Buddhist organizations are common in

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[32] Initially, up to six centers were established in various locations across southern China [*personal communication*]. Vipassanā programs managed by Hong Kong staff were hosted within existing Chinese Buddhist temples. Since then, independent vipassanā centers proliferated across China. As of 2012, the only official center is located in Nanchan si 南禪寺, Fujian Province.

both Theravāda and Chinese Buddhism in Hong Kong. In some cases, the absence of the monastics is simply due to their unavailability; in other cases, some lay organizations deliberately distant themselves from the monastics for a variety of reasons.[33] In the case of Vipassanā Meditation Center under the direction of S. N. Goenka, the attempt to universalize Buddhist teachings results in its non-religious outlook, a phenomenon also gradually emerging in Chinese Buddhism, in particular with groups of foreign, non-Chinese affiliation.[34]

Others

Some smaller Theravāda groups without permanent premises include the Sunlun Meditation Group whose activities in Hong Kong began since 1987 as mentioned[35] and followers of the Burmese monk U

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[33] Historically, the Buddha allowed lay disciples to offer Buddhist teachings to fellow lay Buddhists, but not to the ordained monastics. However, properly speaking, the Buddhist community or sangha as the Buddha conceived consisted of the four categories of Buddhists, namely *bhikkhu* (monks), *bhikkunī* (nuns), *upāsaka* (lay male devotees) and *upāsikā* (lay female devotees).

[34] Leaving asides the handful of heterodox Buddhism-inspired religious or dubious commercial organizations which are not recognized by the mainstream Buddhist and are labeled generally as "pseudo-Buddhist sects," (*fufo waidao* 附佛外道) a handful of lay Chinese Buddhist groups of unorthodox setups and ambivalent monastic-laic character may also be found in Hong Kong. Among them are the Dharmasthiti Group 法住機構 founded in 1982 by the professor-turned-esoteric-guru Fok Tou-hui 霍韜誨, and the Hong Kong Lay Buddhist Mantrayana Society 香港佛教真言宗居士林 founded in 1926 which belong to the Japanese esoteric tradition who makes no distinction between monastics and the laity.

[35] The activities of the Sunlun meditation group appeared to have dwindled in the recent years although meditation classes are still regularly conducted at the Poming Buddhist Center (Puming Foxuehui 普明佛學會), a Chinese Buddhist education and charity organization, and Zhanshan Jingshe 湛山精舍, a lay Buddhist premise.

Sasana.[36] Activities of these groups are conducted either in private homes, Chinese Buddhist centers or Chinese Buddhist temples.

At present, Theravāda meditation classes are also given periodically at the Wang Fat Ching She 弘法精舍, originally a Chinese Buddhist institute of Mahāyāna affiliation, now under the direction of a Theravāda monk from Malaysia. Meditation classes with various degrees of Theravāda elements are also offered in most of the major Mahāyāna Buddhist organizations, as well as non-religious organizations interested in the holistic or therapeutic values of vipassanā meditation.[37]

Activities

While the majority of activities run by the Theravāda groups in Hong Kong are typically Buddhist (meditation, chanting, *dhamma* talks) and follow the models often emulated from those in Theravāda-dominated countries such as Sri Lanka, Thailand and Myanmar, some of them deserve special mention since the way they operate calls for special considerations in the unique social setting of Hong Kong. Once again, as we shall see, Hong Kong provides the fertile ground for the Theravāda Buddhists to look for innovative and creative ways to establish themselves in the Mahāyāna-dominated Chinese society.

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[36] U Sasana currently offers meditation teachings in a private home of a Burmese devotee and at the Buddhist Wisdom Service Centre 佛教明慧服務中心 in Yuen Long. Previously, he operated a meditation center in Mui Wo, Lantau Island before the premise was transferred to a Tibetan monk.

[37] Theravāda or Theravāda-inspired types of meditation classes are offered in Hong Kong most notably at the Hong Kong branch of the Dharma Drum Hill founded by the Taiwanese monk Shengyan 聖嚴 and the Plum Village Foundation founded by the Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh 釋一行. Currently, vipassanā as part of the MBSR (Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction) is promoted by various organizations in Hong Kong such as Wang Fat Ching She.

Meditation Training

As described before, meditation training, a specialty of ordained monastics, is traditionally not openly offered to lay Buddhist devotees regardless of tradition and lineage.[38] However, due to the overall trend of decline of the monastics and the rise of the laity, readily observed in Hong Kong as in elsewhere, together with the modern interests in self-development and individual well-being, the promotion of Theravāda meditation meets the needs of such lay spiritual aspiration, unfulfilled in the Chinese Mahāyāna tradition. Many of the Theravāda groups in Hong Kong described earlier also often find themselves engaged in translation work, mostly from English into Chinese of contemporary lectures or texts of their lineage, or in some cases, directly from the Pāli sutta-s as in the case of the Cultural Department of Chilin Nunnery. More accessible to the modern audience, the new translations are unlike traditional Chinese Buddhist texts, which are burdened often with archaic language and obscure doctrines inaccessible to the general audience. In particular, in the case of meditation training, clear instructions and demonstrations are given in modern language, something considered not entirely feasible in Chinese Buddhism due to the force of tradition. In response, starting from the 1990s, Chinese Buddhist groups especially those from Taiwan and later also Mainland China, organized large-scaled meditation camps which followed the model of this type of Theravāda meditation training.[39]

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[38] This is not to say, however, that lay Buddhists could not be taught meditation and indeed there are a number of lay Buddhists renowned for their meditation practice in all Buddhist traditions. On the other hand, the rise of lay Buddhist teachers with widespread social (S. N. Goenka) and even political (Ikeda Daisaku of Sōka Gakkai) influences is a modern phenomenon. Their positioning and status within Chinese Buddhism and the broader Chinese society would require further investigation.

[39] See the author's forthcoming paper, "Theravāda Buddhism as part of the Buddhist Revival in Mainland China and Hong Kong—Two Paradigms," in *Buddhist Revival in Asia*, (Singapore: Nalanda-Sriwijaya Centre, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2012).

Novitiate Program

The first novitiate program in Hong Kong was a one-week program organized in 1971 at the Wang Fat Ching She 弘法精舍 by Ven. Shi Xichen 釋洗塵.[40] The program, unprecedented in Chinese Buddhism, was inspired by similar events which took place regularly in Thailand and had since then continued irregularly throughout the decades. Theravāda novitiate program was first organized in Hong Kong by the Theravāda Meditation Society in 2005, supported by Theravāda monks and nuns from Thailand, Myanmar and Malaysia, who were experienced in the organization of such events.[41] These novitiate programs offered the participants an opportunity to experience the "exotic life" of a Theravāda monk and were open to the public including those with no former Buddhist experience. The program was held irregularly in the subsequent years (2008, 2009) and a similar program was also organized in Wang Fat Ching She in 2011. It should be noted that the Chinese novitiate program we mentioned earlier, unprecedented as it might have seemed, was in fact so much a public event as a religious one confined within the monastic setup following largely the format of the traditional Chinese Eight-precepts retreats 八關齋戒.[42] The Theravāda novitiate programs, on the other hand, served to educate the public how it may operate within the Chinese society, who tends to see Theravāda Buddhism a foreign religion.

Conclusion

In considering how Theravāda Buddhism thrived and established itself in Hong Kong starting from the 1990s, one should bear in mind the overall

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[40] Neiming《內明》8(1972), 53, quoted in Deng, *Ershi shiji zhi xiaogang fojiao*, 2nd ed., 116.

[41] The program held under the auspice of a Thai temple in Tai Po had about 30 participants and a large support teams. Accessed November 11, 2011, http://www.hktheravada.org/down/2005%201st%20NC%20Magazine%203pg.pdf.

[42] Technically, the retreat serves to provide a one-day experience for the lay devotees. For a description, see《在家菩薩戒本》Zaijia pusa jie ben (Hong Kong: s.n., 2006).

trend of development of Buddhism in Hong Kong and the larger Chinese society. Despite intermittent flourishes due to the unique political and social status of Hong Kong, Chinese Buddhism in Hong Kong did not escape the general decline of the traditional monastic setups, and the rise of lay Buddhism. The advent of Theravāda Buddhism in the 1990s creates therefore a new opportunity for Chinese Buddhists to meet the rising spiritual aspiration of the local community whose needs are no longer satisfied within orthodox Chinese Buddhism. The great varieties of the way Theravāda organizations operate currently, as well as their many activities unheard of among the traditional Chinese Buddhist groups, attest to their creativity and willingness to adapt to the contemporary society. Theravāda Buddhism and their activities may therefore be seen as also a driving factor to induce changes and reforms in Chinese Buddhism in Hong Kong, inspiring very likely their Mainland counterparts at the same time.

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香港的南傳佛教與南傳禪修

麥文彪

摘 要

由於香港特殊的社會、政治和各種地緣因素，佛教在香港的發展自二十世紀早期起走上一條與中國大陸不同的路。各種有利因素促使香港佛教長期以來在華人世界裏擔當前瞻性的角色。本文探討自九十年代於香港扎根並迅速發展的南傳佛教並嘗試評估其特質和對本土以至華人社區裏主流大乘佛教的影響。

關鍵詞：香港、南傳佛教、漢傳佛教、禪修

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