

## Book Review

*Journal of Global Buddhism* 6 (2005):12 - 15



**Buddhism in the Modern World: Adaptations of an Ancient Tradition.** Edited by Steven Heine and Charles S. Prebish. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, x + 287 pages, ISBN 0-19-514697-2 (hardback), £39.50; 0-19-514698-0 (paperback), £12.50.

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This edited collection of essays "explores how a variety of traditional Buddhist schools and movements have been affected by encountering the myriad forces of modernization, especially those factors unique to the Asian experience" (p. 5). The volume manages to be both a good read and a rich resource. Its coverage is satisfyingly broad and varied as it charts the trajectories of individuals and of institutions, including nation states, within the somewhat slippery era of "the modern." Of course there is always more to say, but the strength of this volume lies in the fact that it manages to give a flavor of the variety of adaptations made and being made within Buddhism, not merely as a result of its encounter with modernization, but also because of its historical diversity. In a book that probably has a chapter or two to fit everyone's interests —perusal of the index certainly gave me room for optimism — I found it rewarding also to find areas new to me addressed in accessible and engaging ways.

In "Aniconism versus Iconism in Thai Buddhism," Donald Swearer argues that "the increasing popularity of image consecration rites in recent years reflects not a strengthening of Buddhist institutions in Thai society but their weakening as a consequence of the impact of the decline of the sangha in other areas, for example, education" (p. 15). Swearer shows how, in Thailand, old debates about the nature, purpose and validity of ritual objects are given a new social and political context. Nathan Katz traces the history of the Dambulla cave temples in an illustrated essay about Sinhalese Buddhism. Katz uses this case study to argue that modern Sinhalese Buddhism began in Kandyan times and is not, as some have argued, entirely the product of its encounter with the British. The question of whether recent developments in Buddhism result from re-evaluation of tradition, the westernization process, indigenous political circumstances, and/or other causal factors is a theme that runs through the collection.

Co-editor Charles Prebish reviews the content of the Vinaya and considers the problems associated with changes to monastic discipline in the West, principally in relation to the Theravada tradition. In "Varying the Vinaya: Creative Responses to Modernity" he argues that cultural and climatic conditions in Western nations mean that certain precepts are difficult to maintain. These include precepts which relate to touching women, clothing, travelling in the course of monastic life, and eating with lay supporters. Prebish cites some examples where adaptations have been made, but also shows that there is currently no consensus about the validity of adapting the Vinaya.

A highlight is Raoul Birnbaum's engaging essay "Master Hongyi Looks Back." The Master Hongyi of the title is a complex character also known as Li Shutong (1880-1942), a famous Chinese "modern man" skilled in the arts who became a monk in adult life. The essay

incorporates a translation of Hongyi's autobiographical account, *My Experiences in "Leaving Home at West Lake."* We learn that Master Hongyi was in the habit of frequently changing his name in the context of both lay and monastic life. This constant re-presentation of self is one of the reasons why Birnbaum constructs from Hongyi's own writings, and from a photographic record of his life, what he calls a "performance of self." Birnbaum situates his discussion within the context of a tradition of autobiographical and biographical writing by Chinese monks and patriarchs. Of particular interest is the way in which Hongyi continued to make what appear to be highly self-conscious presentations of himself as his attitudes changed. These presentations culminated in the autobiographical account which Birnbaum includes in full, and which was written in response to a request for an account of Buddhist life in Hangzhou. Birnbaum is at pains to show how complex a character Hongyi was and builds a convincing analysis of the autobiographical account showing how it indicates the changes the monk had undergone in his Buddhist training. Unlike others, Hongyi did not make claims about his spiritual experiences but instead, by discussing the gentle and self-effacing actions of others, he displayed his perception of both his own faults and achievements.

In "Transitions in the Practice and Defence of Chinese Pure Land Buddhism," Charles Jones addresses the ways in which Chinese Pure Land Buddhism, exemplified in Taiwan, has engaged with some of the characteristic features of modernity or modernism. Jones outlines three contrasting approaches to Pure Land thought. The first is the traditional "popular" approach, which concentrates on salvation at death. The second is an approach supported by the second chapter of the *Vimalakirti-nirdesa* sutra, which is therefore just as traditional — although it is not as popular. This argues that any land is pure from the viewpoint of an enlightened observer. And third, Jones addresses a more "socially engaged" perspective embedded in action to make the world a Pure Land by addressing inequality wherever it is found. Jones gives examples of Pure Land thinkers, both lay and clerical, who hold these three positions, principally the conservative Taixu (1911-1949) and the modern masters Lin Qiuwu (1903-1934) and Yinshun (1906-). He also summarizes the Western analysis of modernity/modernism in sections that are clear and useful, containing succinct phrases excellent for mining for undergraduate essay titles!

It is one of the strengths of this volume that it draws on varied disciplinary perspectives. It brings together analysis of Buddhism and modernity not just in contrasting locations but also through contrasting analytical styles. Inevitably, therefore — and depending on the reader's own methodological background and familiarity with contrasting parts of the Buddhist world — some chapters will present more of a challenge than others. Bongkil Chung's "Won Buddhism: The Historical Context of Sot'aesan's Reformation of Buddhism for the Modern World" was my challenge! This is a rich account of the intellectual and philosophical lineage of Won Buddhism and of the characters who represent these connections. Won Buddhism, is one of three Korean indigenous religions that developed in the twentieth century. Chung shows how, though distinctive, the three religions are interconnected, developing as they did at a time when Korea was emerging from pro-Confucian persecution of Buddhism in the five centuries of the Chosen dynasty (1392-1910). Through careful analysis, Chung explains how Won Buddhism represents a synthesis of Confucian ethical tenets and the metaphysical teachings of Mahayana Buddhism. Like Jones' modernist example of Taiwanese Pure Land Buddhism, the resulting teachings are concerned with ways to live in this world rather than with preparation for a future existence. This is not a straightforward read and the essay is not amenable to summary, being packed with points of comparison and contrast. The latter vary between the pragmatic transformation of resentment into gratitude and an exposition of the Won understanding of Irwonsang (unitary circular form).

Co-editor Steven Heine considers the authenticity of the Shushogi, which was compiled in the 1880s, as a distillation of the thought of Dogen. In "Abbreviation or Aberration: The Role of the Shushogi in Modern Soto Zen Buddhism," he compares the 75, 95, and 12 fascicle versions of the thirteenth century Shobogenzo with the much later popular text. The Shushogi "is a condensed scripture preaching the doctrine of confession as a vehicle to salvation" (p. 176) which is used extensively in Japanese funerary rites but also in other aspects of contemporary Soto Zen practice by both lay and monastic adherents. As we might expect, Heine cannot conclude that the Shushogi is either simply an abbreviation or necessarily an aberration. In the process of considering whether it may be one or the other, he emphasises the complex relationship that exists between teacher and text, and its appropriators and critics, such that "Dogen and Dogen Zen are entangled in an ongoing process of creative misunderstanding and creative hermeneutics" (p. 187). Here, as in many of the essays in this collection, Heine's analysis includes consideration of factions within traditional Buddhism that are concerned with social engagement.

In "By Imperial Edict and Shogunal Decree," Jacqueline Stone provides a welcome and lucid account of two modern reinterpretations of one of Nichiren's three great secret laws, the *kaiden* (ordination platform). Stone traces varied interpretations of Nichiren's writings on this somewhat elusive concept and, in particular, the ways in which it has been elucidated by Chigaku Tanaka and recent and contemporary leaders of the Soka Gakkai. The essay is a perfect example of how, in order to find contemporary relevance for orthodox but periodically marginalized teachings, religious leaders must have the skills to read a number of complex and conflicting variables including the political climate. It thus has relevance beyond its immediate subject matter.

Daniel Cozort's essay, "The Making of the Western Lama," argues that in order to satisfy the demand for teachers of Tibetan Buddhism among Westerners, it is increasingly necessary for Westerners to be trained to teach. This is because there are insufficient teachers of Tibetan origin, trained according to traditional Tibetan methods, to satisfy demand. Fortunately, the chapter does not stand or fall on the accuracy of Cozort's opening assertion concerning Tibetan Buddhism: "it has become clear that there is only one major barrier to its further expansion: the emergence of a cadre of Western-born teachers." Regardless of the truth or otherwise of that contentious statement, in order to illustrate the issue Cozort focuses on the traditionally scholastic Gelugpa. The chapter begins with an account of the Gelugpa *geshe* training program which it contrasts with two schemes aimed at Western converts and run by the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition and the New Kadampa Tradition (NKT), respectively. Cozort contrasts the schemes in terms of their textual content and the demands made on participants. This was a thoroughly worthwhile exercise. Part of his argument concerns the narrow curriculum of the NKT. He discusses this with exclusive reference to NKT internal sources that describe the movement as "an association of independent centres with a weak center" (p. 240). However, fieldwork based accounts of the NKT produced over the last decade consistently find that, regardless of the movement's rhetoric, it is highly controlled, at least in the UK where the majority of its centres can be found. The essay would therefore have been more rounded with reference to academic analysis published in the UK, especially the work of David Kay.

Tara Doyle's chapter, "Liberate the Mahabodhi Temple!," both describes and analyzes tensions in Bodh Gaya where Ambedkarites have since 1992 been protesting Hindu control of the Mahabodhi temple. Doyle places this dispute within the context of recent Indian politics and socially engaged Buddhism. The Dalit campaign is led by Surai Sasai, Japanese by birth but now an Indian national, who is willing to pursue a militant style of Buddhism that, Doyle

argues, comes from his Nichiren background. The political context for the dispute is one in which groups organized on caste and religious lines are normally in tension. Doyle draws comparisons between the Bodh Gaya dispute and the nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party campaign to build a Hindu temple at Ayodhya but also shows that the self-styled Mahabodhi Liberation Committee is influenced by the example of Gandhi. She shows that while there are significant similarities between the Mahabodhi campaign and actions at Ayodhya, there are also important difficulties between the two, the main one being that in the Buddhist case, "the potential for massive political communal upheaval was and is simply not there" (p. 266). Neither is support from foreign Buddhists who visit Bodh Gaya in large numbers but who are reluctant to be drawn into the argument. The chapter gives details of the dispute and makes connections between Surai Sasai and the Indian teachers who he sees as being in his own lineage, including, Ambedkar and Anagarika Dhammapala. The strengths of this chapter are to be found first in the information about this dispute which is both well informed and clearly articulated and second in the useful challenges and additions it makes to recent theorizing about socially engaged Buddhism.

The introduction to the volume makes a number of claims to uniqueness which are perhaps not fully justified (given the recent prolific output of one of its editors, among others), but it is unique in its breadth of coverage and it is this that makes the volume so valuable and definitely one for the library shelf.