



Charles Brewer Jones. *Buddhism in Taiwan: Religion and the State, 1660-1990*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999, xvii + 259 pages, ISBN 0-8248-2061-4, US \$46.00.

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Charles Jones offers in this book the first study in a Western language on the institutional and political history of Chinese Buddhism in Taiwan. This focus, warns the author, means that this study does not look in depth into the actions of Japanese Buddhists when Taiwan was under colonial rule, nor into Theravāda Buddhism and Tibetan esoteric Buddhism, which are growing in popularity on the island. This study convincingly makes the case that Chinese Buddhism in Taiwan is distinct from its counterpart in the mainland since the beginning of its implantation on the island, at the end of the Ming dynasty.

The narrative of *Buddhism in Taiwan* is divided into three parts that reflect the dramatic changes the island has been through in the last three centuries. The first chapter stresses that the distinctive evolution of Buddhism on the island has been shaped by the nature of Taiwan as an immigrant society. Although some continuity with the tradition in the mainland has been maintained — in particular the reliance by the clergy on good relations with the government for its survival — important discontinuities have emerged early. In particular, Charles Jones argues that privately built temples have been more commonplace in Taiwan than on the continent because of the weakness of the central government's control over the island (p. 7). As a result of that phenomenon, heterodox practices have been common in Taiwan.

This book performs a useful service by introducing Zhaijiao (the vegetarian religion), a lay-based form of Buddhism derived from these practices and that thrived in Taiwan as a result of orthodox monks' lack of interest for the development of the religion on the island. Charles Jones discusses in great details Zhaijiao's beliefs and introduces its three main sects. After making the case that these sects were distinct from clergy-based Buddhism, the author points to one of the central features that sets Chinese Buddhism in Taiwan apart from the tradition in the continent. The circumstances of Japanese colonization, he argues, have led the orthodox clergy and members of Zhaijiao sects to found associations together in order to ensure the survival of the Buddhist tradition. This attitude on the part of the clergy, he notes, differs remarkably from that which prevailed on the continent, where the clergy usually sided with governments in its efforts to promote orthodoxy (p. 30).

The second part of *Buddhism in Taiwan* contains two chapters that explain in greater detail how this specificity of Chinese Buddhism on the island favored the survival of the religion despite the Japanese colonial policy of assimilation. Charles Jones comes up with some unexpected findings in his description of Buddhism at the local level. In his detailed description of the four major lineages of Chinese Buddhism between 1895 and 1945, he demonstrates that few locals joined the Japanese Buddhist sects, despite a thorough policy of acculturation that went as far as requiring from Taiwanese that they adopt Japanese names (p. 37). Far from being assimilated, local Buddhism thrived. Meanwhile, organizations that were national in scope, and in which prominent monks and Zhaijiao devotees were active, cooperated closely with Japanese authorities, and in so doing, deprived the colonial government of any pretext for the persecution of Chinese Buddhism. Unfortunately, after having so convincingly made the case for the relevance of Zhaijiao for the history of Chinese Buddhism in Taiwan prior to the retrocession of the island to China in 1945, Charles Jones leaves it to other researchers to explore that trend during the following fifty years.

The first chapter of this book's third part discusses the complex set of circumstances that have led to the reassertion of the orthodox clergy after the Kuomintang (KMT) gained control of Taiwan. This discussion is followed by a chapter describing the Buddhist Association of the ROC (BAROC), the organization mandated by the KMT to represent — in theory — the interests of all Chinese Buddhists. Finally, a third chapter introduces us to some of the associations that have emerged in the 1970s and superseded the BAROC in terms of influence.

The focus on the BAROC is understandable, in light of the historical

role played by the BAROC until 1989, when the government passed a new law on civic associations legalizing the creation of other organizations. The reader must be aware, however, that the situation of Chinese Buddhism in Taiwan has changed tremendously during the 1990s. The importance of the BAROC has diminished dramatically during that decade, to the point where the association pales to Fo Kuang Shan and Tzu Chi, two of the organizations discussed by Charles Jones. This has been made especially clear between 1994 and 1996, when the BAROC tried, and ultimately failed, to convince the KMT that the government should legislate on Buddhism. Even more remarkable has been the political activism of some Buddhist organizations, a major development that unfolded after the author of this study concludes this research, conducted in 1993 and 1994. In 1995, in particular, the Ven. Xingyun, the founder of the Fo Kuang Shan monastic order, supported a candidate for the ROC presidency that obtained ten percent of the popular vote. One year later, the Buddha Light Association International (BLIA), the lay organization established by Xingyun, joined mass movements of demonstration asking for, and obtaining, the resignation of then Premier Lien Zhan. Charles Jones cannot be faulted for oversight, however, because, as mentioned above, the scope of his study covers events up to 1990. While doing research on the political behavior of Chinese Buddhist organizations in Taiwan, I found his Ph.D. dissertation — out of which this book is derived — extremely useful, and do not hesitate to recommend it as an essential starting point for research on Chinese Buddhism in Taiwan.