

Theravāda Buddhism as Part of the Buddhist Revival in Mainland China and Hong Kong: Two Paradigms

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BACKGROUND

IN CONTEMPORARY BUDDHIST literature, the term ‘Buddhist revival’ carries different levels of meaning. Very broadly (and somewhat vaguely), it refers to the modern interest in Buddhism as a world religion after the ancient, original teachings of the Buddha were forgotten by many for centuries including in its native India. This definition, however, does not immediately apply in the case of China where Buddhism has had an almost uninterrupted presence for nearly two thousand years and was indigenized, most notably in the forms of Pure Land and Chan, to the extent that Buddhism is no longer recognized as a foreign religion in China.¹ When we talk about the Buddhist revival in the Chinese context, we mostly refer to two distinct concepts: first, the Buddhist modernization movement since the late nineteenth century, which aimed to revitalize Chinese Buddhism after centuries of stagnation and decline;² second, the resumption or normalization of Buddhist activities after the disastrous Cultural Revolution (1966-76) during which Buddhism was nearly decimated. In this paper, as we shall see, these three different definitions of ‘Buddhist revival’ represent different layers of factors which interact with each other to drive the contemporary development of Buddhism in China.

The twentieth century was one of the most tumultuous times in Chinese history. The religious landscape was not spared from all the

social and political upheavals, many of which were unprecedented in terms of scope and magnitude. When the Republic of China was founded in 1912 after the collapse of the Qing Dynasty, Buddhism was in dire need of a major reform to face modernization as well as a new world order. In the eyes of the non-Buddhist Chinese, Buddhism retarded the progress of New China.³ Attempts to revitalize the religion were made, serving as the foundation for subsequent development.⁴ During the Republican period (1912-49), foreign travel became possible for the ordinary Chinese for the first time. In the 1930s, contacts with foreign Buddhists, especially those of Theravāda countries, beside the ones of Japan and Tibet with whom there were historical ties, flourished.⁵ Meanwhile, Buddhist dialogue at the diplomatic level grew as the Republic of China gradually developed as a modern nation. In particular, Chinese Buddhist leaders demonstrated their patriotism during the national resistance against the Japanese invasion.⁶ In sum, though Buddhism itself might not have grown in China during the early half of the twentieth century, it saw some important innovations as a result of the revitalization movement. Furthermore, its influences expanded in the areas of education and diplomacy.

The development of Chinese Buddhism took a sharp turn when the People's Republic of China (PRC) was founded in 1949. Buddhism needed to justify its existence within the socialist ideology and was obliged to collaborate with a government that mistrusted religions in general.⁷ None the less, despite the inherent antagonism between Communism and religions, and the mayhem that all religious communities experienced during the Cultural Revolution, Buddhism was, in fact, supported and favoured in China under the Communist regime for the most part.⁸ More accurately, the state of Chinese Buddhism since 1949 may be described in three stages, namely, integration, destruction and revival.⁹ During the early years of the PRC, Buddhism was recognized as a means for peaceful cooperation amongst neighbouring Asian countries,¹⁰ and the Buddhist Association of China (BAC; 中國佛教協會) was established in 1953 under the auspices of Mao to mainly further various diplomatic initiatives started since the Republican Era.¹¹ The BAC, a patriotic religious organization supervised by the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA),

served as a liaison between the Buddhist communities and the government, representing the interests of both parties. During the 1960s and early 1970s, a series of ultra-leftist campaigns, including the infamous Cultural Revolution, which were later denounced, left Buddhism severely desecrated across the country with the number of monastics and functioning temples reaching a historical low.¹² In the 1980s, Buddhism began to show signs of revival as the country was gradually liberalized on various fronts with Jiang Zemin urging a ‘more tolerant management of religious organizations’ in 1990.¹³ However, judging from the number of Buddhist monastics, temples and educational institutes, Chinese Buddhism has yet to recover to its pre-1949 state (Table 11.1).

TABLE 11.1: NUMBER OF BUDDHIST MONASTICS AND TEMPLES IN CHINA¹⁴

Year	Number of monastics	Number of temples
1930	740,000	–
1940	500,000	–
1949	–	40,000
1976	–	–
1980	–	100
1994	40,000	5,000
1997	70,000	8,000
2006	100,000	15,000

Some scholars have estimated that the current number of practising Chinese Buddhists has reached 300 million, making up around 20 per cent of the Mainland Chinese population, with around 100,000 monastics in the Chinese Buddhist tradition alone.¹⁵ In recent decades, the Chinese government’s enthusiastic support of Buddhism was marked by a number of high-profile events, such as the World Buddhist Forum starting in 2005, organized by the United Front Work Department with a multi-million dollar budget. These extravagant events indicate the double role that the Chinese government has envisioned Buddhism as playing in its foreign policy of ‘Peaceful Rise’ (和平崛起) and internal policy of ‘Harmonious Society’ (和諧社會) – a role that cannot be played by the other four religions legally

recognized in China, namely, Daoism, Islam, Catholicism and Protestantism.

Meanwhile, in places such as Taiwan and Hong Kong, as well as other overseas Chinese communities where Chinese culture was less severely affected, Buddhism did not experience such a dramatic decline and growth and has remained a visible part of the Chinese societies there all along. Although Mainland China and Hong Kong share the same historical and cultural roots, the evolution of Buddhism in these places took separate courses due to the different political and social environments. In the case of Hong Kong, during the British colonial rule for over 150 years (1842-1997), Buddhism was largely unaffected due to the government's *laissez-faire* policy toward local culture and religions. Moreover, due to the relatively stable environment of Hong Kong, it served as a refuge to those who tried to escape from the turmoil in the Mainland. Among the refugees were the monastics who eventually stayed behind and built some of the earliest Buddhist monasteries in Hong Kong.¹⁶ After the brief flourishing of Japanese Buddhism during the Japanese occupation (1941-5), Chinese Buddhism quickly resumed its role in education and charity in the local society. Prior to the founding of the PRC in 1949, Hong Kong saw a major influx of monastics who escaped communism and brought with them the hope to preserve and spread Buddhism in the British colony. New monasteries and Buddhist institutes were built to cater to the thousands of monastics arriving from the north. Although the influx ended by the 1960s and some of the refuge seekers eventually left Hong Kong, they laid an important foundation for the local development of Buddhism which grew rapidly in the following decades. Due to the generally liberal policy of the government, the Hong Kong Buddhists were able to try new ways to develop Buddhism. Starting from the late 1950s, a number of highly active Buddhist youth organizations were founded.¹⁷ In 1960, Shi Xiaoyun [釋曉雲 (遊雲山)] organized the first Buddhist summer camp for the youth.¹⁸ As an attempt to promote Buddhist knowledge in the modern world, the first 'Chinese Buddhist Bible' was published by Luo Shixian (羅時憲) and other lay Buddhists in Hong Kong in 1961.¹⁹ In the same year, the Hong Kong Chinese Buddhist Association proposed that the government make Vesak (the Buddha's Birthday) a public holiday.²⁰

In 1969, the Hong Kong Buddhist College (能仁書院) was founded, which was arguably the first modern Chinese Buddhist college.²¹ In 1971, inspired by the novitiate programme in Thailand, Ven. Shi Xichen (釋洗塵) organized the first Chinese Mahāyāna novitiate programme.²² These examples are all heralded as major innovations in Chinese Buddhism – all made possible due to the unique position of Hong Kong, unlike the Mainland or even Taiwan during its early years before martial law was officially lifted in 1987.

In the present study, Hong Kong, thus, serves as a benchmark when compared to Mainland China where traditional culture and religion, including Buddhism, have been subject to various types of reform and restriction.²³ The comparison would further reveal some salient and common characteristics of Buddhist development in contemporary Chinese societies, as well as details on how Buddhism evolves under different circumstances.

As China gradually rises as a world power, the development of various aspects of contemporary Chinese society becomes a topic of global interest. With the number of Chinese Buddhists estimated from anything between 286 to 690 million (Table 11.2), any future development of Chinese Buddhism will have a significant impact on both the Chinese societies as well as the world at large. The growth of Theravāda Buddhism in China in the past decades may be seen as part of this bigger development as a whole.

TABLE 11.2: ESTIMATED NUMBER OF CHINESE BUDDHIST POPULATION IN 2010

Region	Population (millions) ²⁴	Percentage of Buddhists ²⁵	Number of Buddhists (millions)
China (PRC)	1,338.1	20.0 ²⁶ -50.0	267.6-669.1
Hong Kong (SAR)	7.0	35.0 ²⁷ -66.0	2.5-4.2
Taiwan	23.2	23.9 ²⁸ -70.4	5.5-16.3
Total	1,368.3	20.0-50.0	276.6-689.6

THERAVĀDA BUDDHISM IN CHINA²⁹

Theravāda Buddhism has an indigenous presence in south-western China dating back as early as the seventh century, and its present form is closely connected with Theravāda Buddhism as practised in

neighbouring Thailand and Myanmar.³⁰ Currently, it is an integral part of the ethnic Dai community (傣族) as well as other ethnic minorities,³¹ with the number of ordained monks and novices reaching over 10,000,³² and the indigenous Buddhist population nearly a million.³³ Theravāda Buddhism in contemporary China, despite the social and political turmoil throughout the twentieth century, has retained much of its traditional character, notably the hierarchical structure of the Sangha, as well as the dynamic interaction between the monastics and the laities.³⁴ In terms of practice, it shares its orthodox character with that of other Theravāda communities in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia, such as the adherence to Vinaya concerning ordination, fortnightly *poṣadha*-recitation and daily alms-taking, customs which are no longer practised in Chinese Buddhism.³⁵ Presently, this indigenous form of Theravāda Buddhism in China shows little growth,³⁶ although its presence is evaluated by some as representing the traditional values of the indigenous culture.³⁷

Contemporary Chinese Buddhists came into contact with Theravāda Buddhists from other parts of the world as equals from the end of the nineteenth century when Theravāda Buddhism began to reach a global audience, starting with Anagarika Dharmapala, founder of the Maha Bodhi Society in 1891, who represented 'Southern Buddhism' at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893, followed, most notably, by G.P. Malalasekera who was the founding president of the World Fellowship of Buddhists in the 1950s. Among the earliest, though little mentioned anecdotes between the Theravāda and Chinese Buddhists during this early period was Dharmapala's visit to the Longhua Temple and his subsequent meeting with Yang Wenhui, the father of the revival of modern Chinese Buddhism in Shanghai in 1893. Dharmapala, pioneer of the Buddhist revival in India, appealed to the Chinese Buddhists to support the cause of the Maha Bodhi Society in protecting Buddhist holy places in India.³⁸ His effort did not result in any fruitful collaboration as far as the records go, although Yang's, as well as Taixu's later interests in the World Buddhist Movement were possibly influenced by this Theravāda Buddhist.³⁹ Reciprocal visits between Theravāda and Chinese Buddhists began in the 1920s and lasted throughout the Republican Period.⁴⁰ As the prestige of Theravāda Buddhism continued to rise globally, eminent

Chinese Buddhists such as Taixu gradually realized the values and importance of the Pāli Canon and the Theravāda teachings.⁴¹ A batch of five monks, among whom were Ba Zhou (巴宙) and Ye Jun (葉均) were sent to Sri Lanka in 1935 to master the Pāli language and Theravāda teachings.⁴² After the founding of the PRC, a small number of Chinese monks continued to further their studies in Theravāda countries, mostly Sri Lanka, and, in most cases, with government support through the BAC.

Although Theravāda Buddhism belongs to the minority within Buddhism in China, it has had a number of noticeable effects on contemporary Chinese Buddhism starting from the 1920s. First, the close and dynamic monastic-laity interaction (僧信互動) in many Theravāda countries inspired the Chinese Buddhists on how 'Humanistic Buddhism' (人間佛教) may be realized. Some Chinese Buddhists came to realize that Theravāda Buddhism, in fact, demonstrated how the Bodhisattva path is realized, while being unjustly labelled as 'Hīnayāna' in the Mahāyāna polemics.⁴³ Second, the Western concept of 'Original Buddhism' (原始佛教) based on the unadulterated teachings of the historical Buddha as represented in the Pāli Canon continued to be picked up by the more liberal Mahāyāna Buddhists.⁴⁴ Lastly, the practice of the short-term novitiate programme and meditation training for the laity was introduced into Mahāyāna Buddhism.⁴⁵

THERAVĀDA BUDDHISM IN CHINA SINCE 1949

Since the founding of the BAC in 1953, Theravāda Buddhism was recognized as a part of Chinese Buddhist heritage and diplomatic contact with Theravāda leaders, notably with the Burmese Sangha, soon began. Up to 1965, the BAC continued to try but failed to play a leading role amongst other fellow national Buddhist associations, mostly the Theravāda.⁴⁶ During the civil disruption in the 1960s and the 1970s, Theravāda temples in south-western China and elsewhere were defaced, Buddhist texts and images were burnt, and indigenous Theravāda monks in Sipsongpannā were forced to flee to Southeast Asia or disrobe.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, Theravāda Buddhism remains an important and noticeable part of the everyday life in Sipsongpannā

and other indigenous communities in China. As Buddhism quickly revived itself across China in the post-Mao era, local BAC offices, too, resumed their local functions in supporting Theravāda Buddhism through education and temple maintenance, as well as liaising between the government and monastic leaders. At the diplomatic level, the BAC also resumed contacts with Theravāda countries with the notable plan of sending Chinese monks to Sri Lanka for studies.

From the 1970s, with the growing interest in Buddhist meditation practices around the world, eminent teachers such as Mahasi Sayadaw of Myanmar, S.N. Goenka also of Myanmar and Ajahn Chah of Thailand, esteemed for their knowledge of meditation, were first introduced to the West. Subsequently, meditation centres of the Theravāda vipassana tradition were established all over the world.

By the 1980s, a much more globalized form of Theravāda Buddhism, often with emphasis on meditation practise in a variety of forms, entered Taiwan and Hong Kong, and subsequently Mainland China. Besides a growing number of Theravāda temples across China, lay as well as non-denominational Theravāda study and meditation centres were established in almost all the major cities there at a rapid rate.

In the following sections, I shall take a closer look at the development of Theravāda Buddhism and its affiliated organizations in Hong Kong and China respectively, in terms of its operation.

HONG KONG⁴⁸

Four Theravāda temples and one Theravāda centre of Thai tradition were founded between the 1980s and 1990s in Hong Kong.⁴⁹ These temples are all affiliated with a home temple in Thailand, managed by Thai monks together with support from the locals, located mostly in the rural area (with the exception of the Theravāda centre), and mostly serving the local Thai communities as a place for worship. Currently, some of these temples also run meditation classes for both Buddhist devotees as well as the non-Buddhist public.

From the 1990s, a continuously growing number of vipassana meditation centres were established across the city (Table 11.3). As stipulated by the local laws, these centres operate either as a company

TABLE 11.3: CURRENT THERAVĀDA MEDITATION CENTRES IN HONG KONG

Organization Name	Location	Lineage [original founder]	Date (official)
Dharma Garden (HK) 香港聞思修佛法中心 ⁵⁰	Dharma Garden (You Tam Mei Village 攸潭尾村)	Sudhamma 淨法比丘 (Burmese) [Pa Auk]	1994
Association of Spiritual Friends of Godwin 葛 榮禪修同學會 ⁵¹	Lotus Centre 迴瀾 (Tei Tong Tsai 地塘 仔)	Godwin (Sri Lankan)	1995 (2001)
Cultural Department of Chilin Nunnery 志蓮淨 苑 ⁵²	Diamond Hill 鑽石山	Siu Sik Kau 蕭式球 (Chinese) [Godwin (Sri Lankan)]	1996
Theravāda Meditation Society 香港南傳禪修 學會 ⁵³	Tsim Sha Tsui 尖沙嘴	Ajahn Samahito 文比 丘 (Thai) [Ajahn Chah]	1997 (2001)
Vipassana Meditation Center, Hong Kong 香港內觀靜坐中心 ⁵⁴	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 ⁵⁵	Fa Hong Monastery 法 航精舍 (Tei Tong Tsai 地塘仔)	Mahasi (Burmese)	2005

or registered society under the Companies Ordinance and Societies Ordinance, respectively. Besides regular meetings such as Sunday meditation or reading groups, these centres run longer meditation programmes as well, which last from a day to a few weeks.

Among the six vipassana centres, two are affiliated to a meditation master belonging to a certain lineage (Thai or Burmese), three with lay Buddhist founders (Goenka from Myanmar, Godwin Samararatne from Sri Lanka and a former local follower of Godwin) and one is non-denominational. In addition, some of the more progressive Chinese Mahāyāna temples have adopted a non-denominational outlook by introducing Theravāda meditation as part of their educational programme.

Classes on vipassana meditation are offered outside the Theravāda or Theravāda meditation centres mentioned above, most notably under the aegis of Mahāyāna temples or organizations. Since 1996, Theravāda meditation classes have been regularly offered by the

Cultural Department of, Chilin Nunnery (志蓮淨苑).⁵⁶ At present, Theravāda meditation classes are also held 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. Meditation classes with various degrees of Theravāda elements are also offered by most of the major Mahāyāna Buddhist organizations, as well as non-religious organizations interested in the health benefits or therapeutic values of vipassana.⁵⁷

Beside regular religious events, three types of activities characteristic of these newly-founded Theravāda meditation organizations may be identified: (i) general Theravāda Buddhist education, (ii) meditation programme, and (iii) novitiate programme. General education includes both regular Dhamma talks given by the residing monks or delegates of the organization, as well as special lectures by visiting monks. While these talks or lectures are open to the public without a specific target audience, they mostly serve the needs of their members, introducing to them the doctrine of Theravāda Buddhism (often identified as Original Buddhism; 原始佛教), the Pāli language and chanting. As the majority of the members of these organizations have some exposure to Mahāyāna practices, such educational activities are crucial in developing a Theravāda identity in them. As for the meditation programmes and the novitiate programmes, while the format may vary depending on the organizers, they serve the double purpose of nurturing the members as well as recruiting new ones. These programmes may range from regular weekend camps to intensive ten-day programmes with a rigorous schedule under the supervision of either monks or representatives of the organization. As, traditionally, there is no systematic training in meditation open to lay Mahāyāna Buddhists, the teachings of these new vipassana schools, often offered free of charge, appeal to a large proportion of the Chinese population who are already favourable towards Buddhist teachings.

Since 2005, Theravāda Buddhism has been gaining greater exposure in Hong Kong through the novitiate programme, organized for the first time by the Hong Kong Theravāda Meditation Society.⁵⁸ The programme was supported by Theravāda monks and nuns from Thailand, Myanmar and Malaysia, who were experienced in organizing such events in their countries. Besides members of the society, members

of the public were also welcome. Such novitiate programmes were organized again in 2008 and 2009, with around thirty recruits each time.⁵⁹ These programmes offer the participants an opportunity to experience the 'exotic life' of a Theravāda monk with no specific target participants despite the age limit for practical reasons due to the rigorous nature of the programme. This includes waking up early in the morning, long hours of meditation and soliciting alms in the public. As the mode of interaction between the monastics and the laity in Theravāda Buddhism is very different from that of Chinese Theravāda Buddhism, these novitiate programmes also serve to educate the public on how Theravāda Buddhism may operate within the Chinese society, where the former is largely perceived as a foreign religion.

To sum up, almost all of these activities, characteristic of new Theravāda organizations in Hong Kong, have no specific target recruits. While their teachings are distinctly Theravāda, these organizations have mostly adopted a non-denominational outlook and, in some instances, even a non-Buddhist outlook, as in the case of Goenka's Vipassana Centre, attracting a significant number of non-Buddhists and offering them an opportunity to explore the teachings and practices of Theravāda Buddhism, as well as become potential converts.

MAINLAND CHINA

While the Marxist ideology that the Chinese Communist government subscribes to is antithetical to most religious beliefs and practices, religious freedom is recognized by the Chinese constitution (Article 36) on the condition that religious activities take place within authorized places of worship. New Theravāda organizations, such as those that emerged in Hong Kong, are not legally allowed in China unless special permissions are obtained,⁶⁰ and Theravāda teachings and practices may thrive only in indigenous Theravāda temples or mainstream Mahāyāna Buddhist ones if some form of cooperation is established.

The majority of Theravāda monasteries and temples are concentrated in the south-western part of China, centring on the Yunnan

province. According to a 1997 Chinese government report, there are around 10,000 Theravāda monks and 1,600 temples.⁶¹ The Theravāda temples in Yunnan belong to local monks of Dai ethnicity and have played an important role in the education of local communities. Some of these temples, besides serving the needs of the local community, also have regular contacts with the neighbouring Thai and Myanmar monastic communities despite monitoring by local authorities for fear of infiltration and foreign influences.⁶² Outside Yunnan, two Theravāda temples may be found in Guangdong, one in Chaozhou (潮州) and the other in Jiailing (蕉嶺), founded with donations of the overseas Chinese in Thailand and Indonesia, respectively.⁶³

The most important present development of Theravāda Buddhism in China was, however, connected to neither the indigenous nor overseas orthodox Theravāda monastics. Mainland China experienced a surge of interest in all forms of spiritual and occult practices from the 1980s, subsequent to the policy of liberalization at the time. Despite various setbacks such as the Tian'anmen crackdown in 1989 and the ban of Falungong in 1999, public interest in traditional Chinese and other forms of Buddhist meditation continued to grow. As Theravāda meditation camps started to emerge in Taiwan, Hong Kong and other overseas Chinese communities in Southeast Asia through the 1990s, the Mainland Chinese Buddhists were also inspired to organize such events.

In 1993, the annual 'Lifestyle Chan Summer Camp' (生活禪夏令營) with elements of Theravāda meditation fused with traditional Chan practices, was organized in the Bailin Chan Monastery (柏林禪寺) in Hebei, specifically targeting university students and young professionals.⁶⁴ Since then, a dozen similar events have been held across the country.⁶⁵ In 2001, the first ten-day Goenka vipassana course was organized, again in the Bailin Chan Monastery, and was possibly the first Theravāda meditation programme open to the Mainland Chinese public.⁶⁶ Subsequently, Goenka vipassana courses have been organized regularly in different monasteries across China on a monthly or even weekly basis.⁶⁷ The Mainland Chinese response to Theravāda Buddhism, presented largely through vipassana meditation as a form of spirit-purifying practice or individual cultivation, has been overwhelmingly positive.⁶⁸ Due to the restrictions imposed

upon religious activities in public, however, Theravāda Buddhism cannot gain an independent existence outside the authorized premise provided by the Mahāyāna Buddhists. As a result, some concerns of the Chinese Mahāyāna hardliners have been noted and the public understanding of Theravāda Buddhism remains largely superficial.

Despite restrictions on religious practices imposed by the government, Theravāda Buddhism has thrived in other unique ways, as in the case of Guangdong Pak Au Real Estate Development Limited (廣東柏奧置業有限公司). This company, supported by a local property tycoon, was a publishing house for Theravāda works, mostly promoting the Myanmar meditation master's teachings.

PARADIGMS FOR THE RISE OF THERAVĀDA BUDDHISM IN CHINA

Broadly speaking, the development of Theravāda Buddhism in China follows the trend of growth of Theravāda Buddhism worldwide, as well as in Asia. During the first half of the twentieth century, the natural course of development of Buddhism was very similar for both Mainland China as well as for Hong Kong due to the liberal attitude towards religious affairs of both the Republican and British colonial governments. As international travel became common, mutual exchanges grew naturally. Chinese Buddhists recognized their religion to be in a state of decline and in need of reform, and were eager to learn from their Theravāda co-religionists. However, due to the political unrests of the time, the doctrinal differences between Mahāyāna and Theravāda Buddhism, and possibly the rivalry amongst the two schools in the international arena, the exchanges between Chinese and Theravāda Buddhists bore little fruit then, and the development of Theravāda Buddhism in China did not take place.

Due to the various policies that the Communist regime imposed upon religious affairs, Buddhism in Mainland China took a very different course than it did in a more tolerant and liberal society such as Hong Kong. In contrast to the vibrant post-war development of Chinese Buddhism, the overall poor reception of Theravāda Buddhism points to the fundamental ideological and cultural differences between Theravāda Buddhism and Chinese culture. The former is still

considered alien to this day. The development of Theravāda Buddhism in Hong Kong during the past two decades was, however, dynamic, innovative and organic, demonstrating its great willingness to adapt itself to the needs of the people. As a result, Theravāda Buddhism is no longer confined to the traditional temples originally serving the needs of the local immigrant communities. The great variety of Theravāda organizations in Hong Kong and their activities reflect the freedom and openness that Hong Kong offers to its people. These organizations grow independently with often little interaction with the local Buddhists. Their activities are open to the public in general, without a specific agenda targetting a particular segment of society. Theravāda Buddhism appeals to the Hong Kong public mostly due to the vipassana meditation practice which caters to individual spiritual aspirations, rather than its doctrinal views which are not often compatible with the Mahāyāna values that are largely accepted within Chinese culture. For the Chinese public at large that is less informed about doctrinal details, the international reputation of Theravāda Buddhism, as well as the generally favourable view towards Buddhist teachings, has helped to promote the slow but steady growth of Theravāda Buddhism in Hong Kong.

As compared to Hong Kong where Theravāda Buddhism grew in a reasonably natural and organic way, Theravāda Buddhism in Mainland China encountered much greater difficulties since 1949. Sympathizers of Theravāda Buddhism, government officials or Chinese Buddhists, are often motivated by clearly pronounced goals before they promote or become engaged with anything associated with Theravāda Buddhism. First and foremost, the political leaders in China have recognized the diplomatic value of Buddhism and encourage friendly exchanges between the Chinese and the Theravāda Buddhists, resulting in a variety of collaborations trickling down from a higher level, something not conceivable in Hong Kong or most other secular countries. Second, due to the severe limitations imposed upon religious practices in Mainland China, the development of Theravāda Buddhism has been hampered, relying on the sole support of the Mahāyāna Buddhists. Such collaborations reveal how Chinese Buddhists see the promotion of Theravāda meditation as an expedient to further their cause symbiotically in the Chinese Buddhist revival,

as demonstrated by the great success of Theravāda-inspired meditation camps held across the country. However, how these efforts will translate into the actual development of Theravāda Buddhism in China is yet to be seen.

At present, Theravāda Buddhism has no opportunity to gain an independent existence in the major cities across China. As a result, it will continue to depend on the favourable support of its Mahāyāna hosts. While indigenous Theravāda Buddhism in south-western China as well as a small but growing number of Theravāda monks of Han ethnicity may change the picture eventually, the predominance of the Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhists is unlikely to be challenged. It is, thus, fair to contend that the overall positioning of Theravāda Buddhism in China has changed very little from a century ago. However, new opportunities such as the global interest in vipassana meditation, the growing awareness of the values of the Pāli Canon and Theravāda teachings, as well as the rapid revival of Buddhism on the Mainland, create a new space for Theravāda Buddhism to grow as a niche and possibly elitist form of Buddhism in China.

BUDDHISM IN CHINA IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

As seen above, the development of Theravāda Buddhism in Hong Kong and Mainland China was the result of Buddhist revival both globally and locally. The rise of worldwide interests in Theravāda vipassana meditation was the main factor driving the new development of Theravāda Buddhism in Hong Kong in the form of meditation centres. In the case of Mainland China, interest in Theravāda Buddhism appears to have been expedient against the backdrop of a major religious revival, as Chinese Buddhism recovered its lost ground since the 1980s. Given such rapid growth, Chinese Buddhism remained a major social force in Chinese societies, in particular, Mainland China. The strategic works of the United Front Work Departments reveal how the Chinese government anticipated this demographic trend in the religious landscape of China in the future.

The awkward development of Theravāda Buddhism in Mainland China also suggests certain traits of the reality of the Chinese Buddhist

world which are worth taking note of. First of all, the innate Chinese resistance towards Theravāda Buddhism has been strengthened by the restrictive government policy towards religious practices. The lack of a proper platform for religious expression prevents Theravāda and Mahāyāna Buddhists from engaging in meaningful and otherwise mutually beneficial dialogues, which could have been an opportunity for Chinese Buddhists to embrace a wider global Buddhist world-view. This exchange could also have been an opportunity to make the voice of the Chinese Buddhists heard by a global audience, something envisioned and yet to be achieved since the time of Taixu. Furthermore, the overwhelming success of the Theravāda meditation practice within a Mahāyāna setting also indicates a certain deficiency of traditional Chinese Buddhism, which it has failed to address for a long time. The encounter between the two could, thus, be seen as both a threat as well as an opportunity for Chinese Buddhists. As Chinese Buddhism continues to grow, in order to meet the demands of its growing followers, new generations of charismatic Buddhist leaders of high calibre, who are established in their own traditions as well as capable of carrying on meaningful dialogues with others, are expected. Hopefully, such demands will also be met with more sensible and favourable government policies in which the welfare of Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike would be taken into consideration.

NOTES

1. For general studies in English on modern Chinese Buddhism in China up to the 1950s, see Hackmann (1910), Smith (1912), Chan (1953), Chen (1964), Welch (1967, 1968).
2. The majority of authors on contemporary Chinese Buddhism prior to Welch (quoted above) was unequivocally disparaging toward the state of the Chinese Buddhism in the early twentieth century, describing it as 'in a state of hopeless collapse'. See Smith (1912, 108), as 'moral and spiritual decadence' (Chen 1964: 452), and Chinese clergy as 'notoriously ignorant and corrupt' (Chan 1953: 54). Welch, however, challenged the view and argued that Chinese Buddhism was in a variegated state prior to the so-called 'revival'. Welch (1967) 408. Also, Welch (1968): 1-2.
3. After the collapse of the Qing Dynasty, in a movement known as *Miaochan xingxue* (廟產興學), the large amount of land properties owned by temples

- and monasteries were under the constant pressure of both the authority and the public to be turned into schools. For a comprehensive treatment, see Huang 2006. For example of the situation in Yunnan, see Wang (2001): 326, 334, 339.
4. Pioneers such as the eminent lay Buddhist Yang Wenhui (楊文會)(1837-1911) made major attempts to revitalize and modernize Chinese Buddhism through the establishment of Buddhist publishing house, Buddhist institutes and Buddhist organizations. The laity movement, as we shall see, though no longer as prominent as it used to be, continues to be one of the major forces shaping the contemporary development of Buddhism in China.
 5. Welch (1968): 160-93.
 6. Xue Yu (2005).
 7. Though the monastics are by definition those who are devoted to a religious life, both historically as well as contemporarily across different parts of Asia, Buddhist monastics have been much involved in local politics, see Harris (1999). In that sense, the collaboration as well as tension between state and religion is not so unique in the case of Chinese Buddhism.
 8. Zhao (1993).
 9. Mingshan (2003), cited in Ji (2009); Chen and Deng (2000): 56-8.
 10. In 1949, Master Juzan (巨贊) in a memorandum pointed out to Mao that Buddhism was atheistic and could be useful in promoting friendship with Asian countries. In 1952, Master Yuanying (圓瑛) participated the First Peace Conference of Asia and Pacific Region held in Beijing, discussing with fellow Buddhist participants the role of Buddhism in peace development. *Xiandai fojiao* 《现代佛教》(1957).
 11. Zhao (1953): 4.
 12. Public animosity against Buddhism has been noted during the early years of the Republic Era as Buddhism was viewed by some as a backward and corrupted religion, usurping social resources, in particular, land properties (fn. 3). In that sense, the hysteria against Buddhism as part of the 'Four Olds' can be seen as a continuation of this negative tendency. For topics on how Buddhism was affected during and after Cultural Revolution, see Welch (1969), Welch (1972); Strong (1973); Zhao (1993); Wang (2001): 359-63. A large body of memoirs in Chinese is beginning to emerge in recent years and scholarly evaluation of these materials is urgently needed.
 13. Overmyer (2003): 1-2.
 14. Welch (1968); Ji (2009): 8-15.
 15. The figures are based on the field and statistical studies of Ji (2009). A 2005 survey by the East China Normal University gave a lower figure of 200 million Buddhists/Taoists/Folk Religion believers, among the 300 million Chinese (31.4 per cent of Chinese population aged over 16) who considered themselves to be 'religious' Wu (2007). For discussion on the general rise

- of religiosity in post-Mao China, see Luo (1991): 184-91. The official statistics appear to be much more conservative. According to the official report 'Zhongguo de zongjiao xingyangziyou zhuangkuang' 《中国的宗教信仰自由状况》 of 1997, Buddhist/Taoists numbered over 70 millions and there are 13,000 monasteries and 200,000 monastics (120,000 Tibetan, 10,000 Theravāda, c. 70,000 Chinese). <http://www.china.com.cn/ch-book/zongjiao/zongjiao.htm> (accessed 2011.11.11). Some scholars have suggested even greater figures (1999) such as 30-50 per cent and population of 372.75-621.25 million. See Smith (2005): 9-10.
16. For a comprehensive discussion of the history of Buddhism in Hong Kong, see Yongming (1993), Deng (2008.) One of the important differences between Buddhism in Hong Kong and that of the Mainland is that Buddhist monasteries in Hong Kong prior to the 1920s followed mostly the Chan tradition and were practically isolated from the society, with little interaction with the world at large, unlike in some of the Mainland cities where major temples are found within the city. The first lay Buddhist organization found in 1916 and subsequent development of various Buddhist societies, followed the trend in Mainland China, Deng (2008): 41-4, 55.
 17. Deng (2008): 121-2.
 18. Yuanquan (原泉) 46, *Buddhist in Hong Kong* (香港佛教) 1963(40) – both quoted in Deng (2008): 122-3.
 19. Deng (2008): 129. Unfortunately, the work *The Selected Buddhist Scriptures* (佛經選要) remained poorly circulated.
 20. This was realized eventually in 1999, two years after the handover of Hong Kong to PRC. Deng (2008): 109.
 21. Deng (2008): 155.
 22. The one-week programme was organized in Wang Fat Ching She (弘法精舍) with 13 participants in total (*Neiming* (內明) 1972(8): 53, quoted in Deng (2008): 116).
 23. While the 1997 Government Report on religious freedom (see fn. 1) was correct in pointing out the progress of the implementation of the policies on religious freedom since the 'reform and opening-up policy' (改革開放政策) of 1978, legally speaking religious practices are categorically confined within authorized places of worship. Religions have no access to the public including the media. On the other hand, as Zhi 2009 pointed out, the development of internet in China since the 1990s has largely changed the picture.
 24. '2010 World Population Data Sheet'. Population Reference Bureau, Washington D.C.
 25. Estimated figures from Patrick Johnston's *Operation World 1993* with exceptions highlighted individually. Quoted in Smith (2005): 8-10, with an insightful discussion on the definition of 'Buddhist' as compared to 'Christian'.

26. Ji (2009): 8.
27. '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>
28. 'International Religious Freedom Report 2003'. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2003/23825.htm>.
29. Major academic studies and survey on Theravāda Buddhism in China, in particular in Sipsongpannā have been made by scholars in China. See Yang 1984[1958], Li (1983), Yang (1994), Wang (2001), Han and Dong (2004). For Thailand and Japan, see Tanabe (1983), Hayashi (2002), and the West, see Davis (1999), Borchert (2006). As pointed out by Borchert (2006: 4 fn.5), the Chinese studies have the tendency of seeing Theravāda Buddhism as a distinguishing feature of the Dai ethnicity; the Thai studies tend to see the form of Buddhism practised in Sipsongpannā as a degraded form of Theravāda Buddhism practised in Thailand.
30. Wang (2001): 388. It has been suggested that Theravāda Buddhism was introduced by Siamese monks to the then Nanzhao Kingdom (now south-western China including Yunnan and neighbouring areas) during the seventh century. Theravāda Buddhism was established there probably during the time of Dali Kingdom in the early part of the second millennium, Duan (1994): 202. According to some scholars, however, it was stated in a record dated in 1396 that there was no Buddhist practices in Yunnan and the present form of Theravāda Buddhism in Sipsongpannā (西雙版納) was introduced some time between twelfth and fourteenth century, Liu (1993): 89ff; Wang (2001): 389ff. The history of Mahāyāna Buddhism in Sichuan, however, is much earlier, dating possibly to early second century, although the exact form of Buddhism and the route of transmission cannot not be ascertained, Ren (1981): 187. For an overview, see Li (1983); Dao (1985); Li and Wu (1994). For the connection between Sipsongpannā and Dehong (德宏) with Thai and Burmese Buddhism respectively, see Wang (2001): 391ff.
31. Li (1983), Yang (1994), Tan (2005).
32. The figure is taken from the government report of 1997 (see fn. 8 above). In Sipsongpannā alone, according to Borchert's field study in 2002, there were over 600 monks and perhaps 6500 novices in over 550 temples (Borchert 2006: 76). As it is customary in Southeast Asia, most boys disrobe before or soon after becoming monks.
33. Li and Wu (1994): 4; Wang (2001): 368. Some scholars, however, argue that the official figure made for example, the assumption that all Dai people believe in Buddhism, a statement that is no longer true after the Cultural Revolution as reflected by the decreasing number of monastics as a percentage of population, Borchert (2006): 15.

34. While the traditional hierarchical organization of Theravāda monasteries was nominally demolished after 1949, the original system was not replaced as in the case of Chinese and Tibetan monasteries, Li and Wu (1994): 6-7. For a recent assessment of the Theravāda Buddhism in Yunnan, see Dao (1985); Liu (1993): 256-70; Li and Wu (1994): 4-9; Zheng (2011).
35. For differences of contemporary Theravāda and Chinese Mahāyāna practices and how the former had affected the latter, see Welch (1967): 30, 110, 112-14, 207-8, 247, 300-1, 328, 385. Currently, some of the Chinese Theravāda practices such as alms-taking are under pressure of the authority to give up and incoming-generating activities for 'self-sustenance' such as tourism are encouraged, see Li and Wu (1994): 9. According to some, the Theravāda practices in Sipsongpannā are much laxer than those in countries such as Thailand, Borchert (2006): 72 fn.33).
36. The number of monastics in Sipsongpannā stays roughly between 5000-7000 from 1950 up to 1990 with the exception of the 1960s-70s of which statistics are not available (691 in 1981), see Tan (2005): 84. For the problem of increasing number of unmanaged Theravāda temples, see Huang et al. (2006): 117.
37. A number of Western studies such as Evans (2000) and Borchert (2006): 220 have the tendency to attribute the erosion or corruption of traditional indigenous culture solely to the materialistic, atheist Chinese 'colonizers' without taking into full account of the effects of globalization, urbanization, and the economic reality – all the malaise of modernity. To be fair, the problems the indigenous Theravāda culture faces in China are not unlike those other indigenous cultures encounter around the world.
38. Welch (1968): 6.
39. Welch (1968): 180. According to a certain account, however, Yang gave Dharmapāla his 'enthusiastic support', Chen and Deng (2000): 374.
40. The earliest Chinese monk to study in Sri Lanka in modern times was possibly the monk Wanhui who visited Sri Lanka to study Theravāda Buddhism in 1924 (*Eastern Buddhist* 3.3: 274). Later the lay Buddhist Wong Mow-lam (黃茂林) was sent to Sri Lanka by Pure Karma Society of Shanghai to promote dialogue with Theravāda Buddhists. Wong was the editor of an English magazine titled *The Chinese Buddhist* which lasted only a few years before Wong's untimely death during his stay in Sri Lanka. For other contacts during this period between overseas Theravāda and Chinese Buddhists, see Welch (1968): 180-3.
41. However, unlike in Japan where the translation of Pāli Canon systematically began in the 1930s (Beginning with the publication of *Vinaya-piṭaka* and the *Nikāyas* by Takakusu Junichirō and others in 1935/6, continuing up to volume 65 with texts such as the Asoka Edicts published in 1941), the first major Theravāda text was translated into Chinese only in the 1950s, reflecting

- the initial lukewarm reception of Theravāda Buddhism amongst Chinese intellectuals, whose attitude toward Theravāda Buddhism was at best 'ambivalent', Welch (1968): 182.
42. Chen and Deng (2000): 374-6.
 43. This is the remarkable position taken by Taixu and subsequently, Theravāda Buddhism has been described by most Chinese Buddhists and Buddhist scholars as 'Buddhism of Southern Transmission' (南傳佛教), despite it is still occasionally labelled as the 'Small Vehicle' (小乘).
 44. The representation of the Pāli Canon of the Theravāda tradition as the pristine teaching of the historical Buddha was largely the work of Rhys Davids and other textual scholars who, as pointed out by some post-colonial critics, had the tendency of representing 'the complex as the simple' and 'the commingled as the pure' and thus the vernacular and contemporary aspects of Theravāda Buddhism were devalued and dismissed, Lopez (1995): 13 and Hallisey (1995): 31ff. This trend has been most notable in Taiwan, Chen and Deng (2000): 376.
 45. Thus, this Theravāda custom was the inspiration for the novitiate programme organized for the first time by Hong Kong Mahāyāna Buddhists in 1971 as we have seen. See also Chen and Deng (2000): 70, 376.
 46. Chinese Buddhist leaders were eager to show the diplomatic value of Buddhism but failed repeatedly, and demonstrated their failure by the boycott of 7th Conference of World Fellowship of Buddhist, Welch (1969): 128. Theravāda Buddhism was in a way an indomitable rival to the Chinese Buddhists who tried to make their voice heard amongst fellow Buddhists as well as in the world.
 47. Davis (1999): 10.
 48. For detailed discussion, see Mak (2012).
 49. (i) Wat Buddhadhamaram in Hung Shui Kiu, Yuen Long; (ii) Wat Buddhadhamaram affiliate in Pak Nai, Yuen Long; (iii) Wat Dhammaram (大業寺) in Tai Long, Yuen Long; (iv) Wat Mekadhamwanaram (aka Wat Tai Wo (太和寺) in Tai Po. The Dharmakaya Centre, 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.
 50. <http://www.dhammadagarden.org>
 51. <http://www.godwin.org.hk/>
 52. http://www.chilin.edu.hk/edu/work_professor_detail.asp?id=17
 53. <http://www.hktheravada.org>
 54. <http://www.hk.dhamma.org>
 55. <http://hkims.org>
 56. http://www.chilin.edu.hk/edu/work_professor_detail.asp?id=17
 57. 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.

58. As early as the 1970s, similar programmes for Mahāyāna laities of a somewhat smaller scale were organized in Wang Fat Ching She, organized by local Buddhists, although no such programs are heard of in the recent decades.
59. <http://www.hktheravada.org/down/2005%201st%20NC%20Magazine%203pg.pdf>. Accessed 2011.11.11.
60. This is technically possible once permissions from BAC and local officials are obtained. However, to my knowledge, no such new, foreign Theravāda organizations have yet established themselves legally in China in this way.
61. See note 2. According to Foyuan.com, as of 1996, there 1702 Theravāda temples in Yunnan (<http://www.foyan.net/article-101162-1.html>).
62. Lin (1997). According to Huang et al. (2006), so far Theravāda Buddhism in Yunnan has not been considered by the government as a potential threat to national security as Tibetan Buddhism does.
63. See Bhikkhu Metta's (2007) *Guide*. The first one is currently under the care of Kaiyuansi while the other is under the jurisdiction of the local government.
64. According to Wang et al. (2010), participants of the 'Lifestyle Chan Summer Camp' from 1993-2010 have numbered over 6000. Wang et al. further remarked that beside the age requirement of 18-30, the camp also had gradually increased its demand on the participants' education background, from high school to now university undergraduate, Wang et al. (2010): 23.
65. The summer camp organized by Bailin Monastery has been considered by many as the pioneer of such like events held across the Mainland since then, numbering over twenty annually in both 2005 and 2010 (Wang et al. 2010: 25). Bao 2008 named five of the most well known ones: 1. 'Huangmei Chan Culture Summer Camp' (黃梅禪文化夏令營) in Hubei (湖北); 2. 'Journey of Merit and Wisdom' (福慧之旅) at Guanghua Monastery (廣化寺) in Fujian (福建); 3. 'Lushan Chan Tea Gathering' (廬山禪茶會) at Nuonatyuan (諾那塔院) in Jiangxi (江西); 4. 'Buddhist Summer Camp' (佛子夏令營) at Mount Zhongnan (終南山) in Shaanxi (陝西); 5. 'Buddhist Studies Camp' (佛學營) of Qixia Monastery (棲霞寺) in Nanjing (南京).
66. According to Dr. Bao Shengyong, there have been earlier exchange between Theravāda and Chinese Buddhists including informal organization of Theravāda meditation courses, details of which are yet to be documented (personal communication).
67. Officially according to *zhongguo neiguan wang* (中国内观网) (<http://www.vipassana.org.cn/vipassana-schedule.htm>), only three temples were listed, namely 1. Nanchan Monastery in Changding, Fujian, 2. Qianfota Monastery in Meizhou, Guangdong, and 3. Huasheng Monastery in Shenyang, Liaoning.

68. Though no statistic is currently available, vipassana meditation and the study of Pāli is largely welcome in Chinese temples though it appears that the majority of Chinese Buddhist monks are opposed to the idea of having Theravāda monks preaching in their temples. A rather exceptional case would be Venerable Yanzhen (衍真) who organized regularly Theravāda meditation training with a Theravāda monk at Baofeng Chan Monastery (宝峰禅寺) in Jiangxi. Such situation is in contrast to Tibetan Buddhism, where Tibetan Buddhist 'programs' targeting students and young professionals are held in private homes or offices rather than temple grounds. For the situation of these Tibetan Buddhist 'programs' and their responses, see Mak (2007).

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