

CHINA AND AMERICA: BUDDHIST AND INTERRELIGIOUS CONNECTIONS

A talk by Prof. Ron Epstein at a meeting of the China Buddhist Association,
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Our delegation which is here today is jointly sponsored by SARA and the American Chinese Multi-Faith Religious Exchange (ACMFRE) organization.

ACMFRE interfaith goals in China are threefold: 1) To increase bi-lateral understanding about the role of religion in China and the U.S., 2) To explore, from a multi-faith perspective, the contributions offered by organized religion and the challenges to religious faith in modern society, in both China and the U.S., and 3) To discover new directions and opportunities for progress in the dialogue between China and the U.S. on the subject of religion.

Because of time considerations, I will restrict my remarks to very brief comments on the following topics: 1) Buddhism in the United States: History, Typographies and Demographics. 2) Attitudes of American Buddhists toward Buddhism in China. 3) Interests and Perspectives of American Buddhists. 4) Possibilities for Future Cooperation between the Chinese Buddhist Association (CBA) and American Buddhists and for Interreligious Dialogue between CBA and America Religious Groups.

1) Buddhism in the United States: History, Typographies and Demographics

History

In the United States, Buddhism was confined to Asian immigrant communities until the mid-20th century. Beginning in the 1960s, Buddhist teachers from a number of Asian countries who were interested in teaching Euro-Americans arrived in the United States for the first time.

今天我們的代表團是由「國家宗教事務局」和「美中多元宗教交流協會」共同發起而組成的。美中多元宗教交流協會在中國的目標有以下三個：1) 促進中美雙方對宗教的瞭解。2) 從多元宗教的角度，探討中美雙方關於宗教團體的貢獻以及現代社會對宗教信仰所面臨之挑戰。3) 探討中美雙方在宗教事務對話上的新方向與展望。

由於時間有限，我將就以下幾項，簡單說說自己的看法：1) 佛教在美國的歷史，分類和信眾統計。2) 美國佛教徒對中國佛教的態度。3) 美國佛教徒的興趣和觀點。4) 將來在開展美國宗教團體和中國佛教協會之間跨宗教對話方面，以及中國佛教協會和美國佛教之間的合作可能性。

佛教在美國的歷史、分類和信眾統計

歷史

直到上世紀中葉，佛教在美國的傳播只是局限於亞裔移民社區。自1960年起，方有來自亞洲國家的佛教老師向美國白種人傳播佛教。第一位向西方大眾弘法的中國比丘當屬一代高僧 宣化上人（1918-1995）。上人出生在東北的一個農民家庭，十九歲出家，後來得到一代禪門宗師虛雲老和尚（1840-1959）傳授馮仰宗法脉，從而成爲該宗派的第九代傳人。

1962年上人來到舊金山，創立了

中國與美國： 佛教及宗教的聯誼

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The first Chinese Buddhist monk to teach large numbers of Westerners was the Venerable Master Hsuan Hua (Xuanhua) (1918-1995). Having grown up in rural Dongbei in a peasant family, Ven. Master Hsuan Hua went forth from the home-life at the age of 19, and he subsequently received a 9th generation Wei(gui)yang Chan lineage transmission from the great Chan Master Xu Yun (1840-1959).

He arrived in San Francisco in 1962 and founded the Sino-American Buddhist Association, later to become the Dharma Realm Buddhist Association (DRBA), in 1968. His work in the West had four main areas of focus:

1) Bringing the teachings of the Buddha to the West and establishing a proper monastic community of fully ordained monks and nuns (Sangha) there: in 1969 he sent five American disciples to Taiwan to become fully ordained, and since that time several hundred of his disciples have been ordained in the United States. The DRBA has also established a large number of temples, monasteries and retreat centers in both Asia and in the West.

2) Organizing and supporting the translation of the entire Buddhist canon (tripitaka) into English and other Western languages: he founded the Buddhist Text Translation Society in 1969, which has translated over 100 volumes into Western languages.

3) Promoting wholesome education through the establishment of schools and universities: he founded Instilling Goodness Elementary School, Developing Virtue Secondary School, and Dharma Realm Buddhist University. He emphasized not only high academic standards but also the development of good character and virtuous behavior. In his own teaching, he drew not only from Buddhist sources but also from the Confucian tradition and the rich fabric of ancient Chinese literature and culture.

4) Promoting peace and mutual understanding through interreligious dialogue: in 1976, together with the Catholic prelate Paul Cardinal Yubin (1901-1978), he founded the Institute for World Religions, which is now located in Berkeley California and is currently under the directorship of Dharma Master Heng Sure.

Since there have been very few Chinese monks who have followed his lead in bringing Buddhism to the mainstream American community, the influence of Chinese Buddhist traditions on the development of American Buddhism has not yet reached its full potential. Thus far the main influences on American Buddhism have been primarily from Japanese, Tibetan, and Southeast Asian teachers and their disciples.

Typographies of American Buddhism

There are several ways in which we might categorize the kinds of Buddhism that we currently find in the United States, and we find all of these categories: a) According to schools: Mahayana, Theravada, and Esoteric (so-called Vajrayana); b) According to country of origin: China (including Tibet), Japan, Sri Lanka, Southeast Asia; and c) According to sociological considerations: Immigrant Buddhism (primarily devotional)

「中美佛教協會」，即是1968年成立之「法界佛教總會」的前身。上人在西方弘法有四項重點：

1) 向西方傳播佛法，並成立具足戒僧尼二眾（僧伽）的正法道場。

1969年上人送五位美國弟子，前往臺灣受具足戒。自此，他有數百位弟子在美國受具足戒。多年來，法界佛教總會在亞洲和西方國家成立了很多的寺廟、道場和修學中心。

2) 組織及推展譯經工作，將佛教藏經（三藏）所有著作翻譯成英語，和其他西方語言。1969年上人成立了「佛經翻譯委員會」，此譯經會至今已將超過100冊的佛教經論，翻譯成西方語言。

3) 成立學校和大學，推行聖賢教育。上人成立了育良小學、培德中學，和法界佛教大學。上人不僅注重學有所成，更注重學生優良品德的培養。在上人的開示教法之中，他並不局限只引證於佛教經論，而是廣泛採採豐富的古典中國文學與文化典籍。

4) 推動不同宗教之間的對話，增加彼此理解，促進和平。1976年上人和天主教于斌（1901-1978）樞機主教一起創立「法界宗教研究院」。該所位於加州柏克萊市，目前由恒實法師負責指導。

有鑒於宣化上人之後，很少有中國的法師繼續將佛教傳播到美國主流社會，故至今中國傳統佛教對美國佛教發展之影響，仍遠未發揮到其潛力之極致。目前對美國佛教影響甚深的，主要是來自日本、西藏和東南亞的法師們和他們的學生。

美國佛教分類

在美國的佛教的分類，目前有下列幾種不同的方法：1) 根據修行法派分類：有大乘、小乘和金剛乘。2) 根據國家來源分類：可以分為中國佛教（包含藏傳）、日本、斯里蘭卡，及東南亞。3) 根據社會階層分類：可以分為以誠敬為主的移民佛教，和以禪坐為主的歐美白人佛教。4) 根據出家 and 在家分類：也就是根據法師是否已受具足戒和禁欲獨身來區分。

and Euro-American Buddhism (primarily focused on meditation); d) According to monastic and lay distinctions, that is, whether or not the clergy is fully ordained and celibate.

Demographics of American Buddhism

“According to a 2007 poll ... Buddhism is the fourth largest religion in the US after Christianity, ‘no religion’ and Judaism. ... Most studies have indicated a Buddhist population in the United States of between 1 and 4 million. The U.S. State Department's International Religious Freedom Report for 2004 indicates that 2% of the U.S. population is Buddhist, which would mean a total of 5,973,446 Buddhists. ... it appears that roughly 75 to 80 percent of Buddhists in the U.S. are of Asian descent and inherited Buddhism as a family tradition; the remaining 20 to 25 percent are non-Asians.” [Source: Wikipedia]

2) Attitudes of American Buddhists toward Buddhism in China

The relation of most American Buddhists to Buddhism in China is like the relation of children to parents and grandparents. Most forms of Buddhism in the United States trace themselves back, in one or more generations, to founding teachers in China. For instance, as already mentioned, the founding teacher of the CTTB and DRBA, the Venerable Master Xuanhua, was a Chinese master from Dongbei. He is venerated by both Asian-American and Euro-American disciples not only as a great master but also as a representative of the best and the richest of the Chinese cultural heritage. And this is also true in other American Buddhist groups whose teachers are from China.

As it is well known, Mahayana Buddhism in Japan and in Vietnam is also derivative from Buddhism in China. For instance, one of the earliest Euro-American Buddhist groups is the San Francisco Zen Center, whose founding teacher was Shunryu Suzuki, a married Japanese Soto Zen priest. And so the students at that Zen Center revere the Chinese Chan Master Rujing (1162-1228), the teacher of Dogen Zenji (1200-1253) who was the founder of Soto Zen, and all those in the Chinese Caodong Chan Buddhist lineage. It is increasingly common for such Euro-American Buddhists to go on pilgrimages to the temples of the early Chan masters in China. And of course the American Buddhist groups based on the Tibetan traditions are also derivative from that portion of the rich Chinese multi-cultural traditions. Thus we can see that the fundamental attitude of the American Buddhists towards Buddhism in China is generally one of great filial respect.

A recent phenomenon which is helping to bridge the divide between northern Buddhism and southern Buddhism in the United States is the increasing interest in Chinese Mahayana teachings and practices on the part of some American Buddhist monks who are ordained in the southern Buddhist tradition and continue to adhere to their strict Theravada monastic precepts.

美國佛教信眾的統計

「根據2007年一項調查，佛教是美國的第二大宗教，僅次於基督教，『無宗教』和猶太教。大部分的研究顯示出，美國的佛教徒的總數在一百萬到四百萬之間。美國國務院於「2004年國際宗教自由報告」指出，2%的美國人是佛教徒，即共有5,973,446個佛教徒。大概75-80%的美國佛教徒是亞裔，從傳統家庭裏繼承了佛教信仰，剩下的20-25%的佛教徒是非亞裔。」（來源：維基百科）

美國佛教徒對中國佛教的態度

大部份美國佛教徒和中國佛教的關係，就像小孩與父母和祖父母的關係一樣。絕大多數的美國佛教流派，會溯本追源他們的教授師在中國前一代，或更前幾代的情形。譬如，之前所提萬佛聖城和法界佛教總會的創辦人——宣化上人，他是從東北來的中國法師；他的亞裔美籍弟子和歐美弟子們都非常尊崇他，認為他不僅是個最傑出的法師，也是個豐富而優良的中國傳統文化的代表。不但他的弟子們如此，而其他一些來自中國的美國佛教團體的導師們也是如此。

眾所皆知，日本和越南的大乘佛教也都是從中國佛教延伸而來。例如早期的歐美佛教團體裡，其中有一個Soto（曹洞）禪中心，位於舊金山；它的創辦人鈴木俊隆，是位有家室的日本禪傳教士。因此該中心的弟子們都十分景仰中國的——如淨禪師（1162-1228）及其他中國曹洞宗的禪師。如淨禪師，即道元禪師（1200-1253，日本Soto曹洞禪創始人）的師父；（歐）美佛教團體對中國早期禪師的道場做尋根之旅，已蔚為風尚。當然美國佛教團體內的藏傳派系也是從中國多元化的傳統裡所延伸出來的，所以我們可看到美國佛教徒對中國佛教有著如子崇父的親子情結。

最近在美國有個現象，就是有些原本以修習南傳佛教的美國僧人，在恪守南傳嚴格的出家戒律的同時，對中國大乘佛教之教法與修持，產生日益濃厚的興趣，這樣，却是有助於南北傳佛教之溝通的一道好橋樑。

☸ To be continued

☸ 待續