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**Charles S. Prebish, Kenneth K. Tanaka, eds.** *The Faces of Buddhism in America.* Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998. viii + 370 pp. $50.00 (cloth), ISBN 0-520-2-460-3; $22.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-520-20460-7.

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## The Challenge of Defining

Following the first strike of Japanese Zen Buddhism in the 1950s, the United States has become host to a bewildering variety of Buddhist forms. Today, virtually all Buddhist sects originated in Asian countries are present in America. Meanwhile, American adherents and scholar-practitioners of Buddhism have been trying hard to define, or invent, a distinctive American Buddhism.

This book is a very informative collection that shows some of the many faces of, and problems of defining, American Buddhism. As most chapter authors themselves are practitioners of particular Buddhist sects, it provides fascinating insiders' accounts of various subtraditions and dimensions of Buddhism in America.

The book is divided into two parts. The first part is descriptions of various Buddhist traditions in America one by one; the second part is analyses of issues of assimilation, racism, feminism, homosexuality, psychotherapy, etc., within American Buddhism.

In the first part, three chapters focus on traditions that are originated in Japan: Shin, Zen, and Soka Gakkai Buddhisms, and one chapter each on Chinese, Tibetan, Korean, Vietnamese, and Theravada Buddhisms, and Insight Meditation practice in America. The extensive coverage of Japan-originated traditions might reflect the greater influence of Japanese Buddhisms in the United States. However, the chapters on various traditions appear to be uneven in coverage and quality.

Jane Hurst's chapter on Nichiren Shoshu and Soka Gakkai in America is one of the best. It not only provides social and demographic descriptions of American adherents of Soka Gakkai, but also profound analysis of factors for its success in American society since the late 1960s. According to Hurst, Japanese women played critical roles in its early recruitment; it attracted Euro-Americans in the counter-culture, including gay and lesbian members and "refugees from religions with strict moral teachings"; and it is the only Buddhist group that has a sizable number of African American and Hispanic members. Hurst argues that the success of Soka Gakkai has three factors: its theological emphasis on the individual's power to change his/her life for the better, which resonates with the ethos of American culture; its dynamic proselytizing movement by lay people; and its stubborn insistence that its understanding is the only True Buddhism. In contrast, Victor Sogen Hori's chapter on Japanese Zen in America is more of an insider's personal reflection, speaking in disapproval of deliberate Americanization efforts, and is excessively detailed on subtle differences within Japanese Zen that make little sense to outsiders.

Stuart Chandler makes some interesting observations about Chinese Buddhism in America. He sees a symbolic significance for Chinese Buddhists in the legendary history of a Chinese Buddhist monk discovering America in the fifth century, which is popularly believed by many Chinese Buddhists. He finds that Chinese Buddhist organizations with many well-educated members tend to emphasize more on sutra study, on Buddhist compatibility with modern science, and on lay leadership. While he mentions the Hsi Lai Temple and its parent Fo Kuang Shan sect in Taiwan, little or no discussion is made regarding the True Buddha Sect, which was created in Seattle in the 1980s by an immigrant from Taiwan and has established branch temples in all major metropolises, and the Tzu Chi, which is a Buddhist charitable society headquartered in Taiwan and has opened several branch offices in American cities. The selective coverage is even more problematic in the chapter on Korean Buddhism by Mu Soeng. It focuses on a Korean-monk led group mainly serving non-Korean constituents, which is hardly representative of Korean Buddhism in America.

The chapter on Vietnamese Buddhism by Cuong Tu Nguyen and A. W. Barber is based mostly on interviews with two abbots only. One of the interesting points is the repudiation of Thick Nhat Hanh as a representative of Vietnamese Buddhism. Thick Nhat Hanh is one of the

two most visible Buddhist teachers in the West (the other is the Dalai Lama), from whom comes the term "engaged Buddhism" (p. 273). According to the authors, however, Thick Nhat Hanh's practices "do not have any affinity with or any foundation in traditional Vietnamese Buddhist practices" (p. 131). A problem of this chapter is that the many Buddhist terms and names transliterated from so many languages (Sanskrit, Chinese, and Vietnamese) make it hard to read.

In the second part, Martin J. Verhoeven masterfully traces the historical contacts and interactions between Japanese Buddhist missionaries and the first American promoter of Buddhism, Paul Carus, a German immigrant. He shows that "the immense popularity that Oriental religions and philosophy enjoyed in the West can be attributed somewhat to the strange fact that the hybrid forms of Asian thought exported to the Occident were already customized for Western consumption" (p. 220). This is a very fine piece of historical study. In comparison, Rita M. Gross's chapter on the relationship between Western Buddhist women and Tibetan Buddhist masters is a personal, reflective account that affirms women's participation in Tibetan Buddhism despite the abuses of some Tibetan masters."

Acculturation and accommodation on the part of Buddhism is the key developmental issue to the editors. Obviously, there are two kinds of Buddhists in contemporary America: Asian immigrants and their descendants, and Euro-Americans (there are few African and Hispanic Buddhists). While there are incidents of interactions between white and ethnic Buddhists, "such instances remain more the exception than the rule" (p. 203). While the Asian American Buddhism faces the challenge of assimilation, the white Buddhism had the problem of Americanization or defining "American" Buddhism.

Many chapters in the first part provide ample evidences of assimilation on the part of Asian American Buddhism. However, the perceived "Americanization" of white Buddhism seems not distinctively "American." Jan Nattier states that American Buddhism, especially the "elite Buddhism" among well-educated Euro-Americans, has made sweeping accommodations to American values of optimism, activism, egalitarianism, feminism, and a positive valuation of sexuality. Rick Fields argues that there are some general trends that are discernible in the emerging American Buddhism: it is largely a layperson's movement; it is based on sitting meditation; it welcomes psychology as a useful adjunct; it is shaped by feminist insights and critiques; it harbors an impetus toward social action. Field believes that "All these trends, except for the second, are characteristically American components that seem to run counter to Asian norms" (p. 202). However, this judgement ignores the Buddhist reformation in modern China, and perhaps in other parts of Asia as well. Beginning in the 1930s, a Chinese monk Tai Xu led a movement of Buddhist reforms, which have been gloriously carried out in Taiwan since the 1960s. This modern Chinese Buddhism is a "Buddhism in the world" (ren jian fo jiao) that engages the society and politics. It is also a layperson's movement, although its spiritual leaders are monks, such as Hsing Yun and his Fo Kuang Shan order, and nuns, such as Cheng Yen and her Tzu Chi order. Therefore, what are perceived as Americanization by some authors in this book may indeed modernization that happens not just in the United States, but in many countries. Therefore, it is necessary to examine American Buddhism in the broader contexts of modernization, globalization, and transnationalism in the contemporary world.

"The study of Buddhism in America is still in its infancy" (p. 287), Kenneth K. Tanaka concludes in the Epilogue. This informative book is a very good start, and fills some gaps. Let us hope to see more scholarly studies of various Buddhist traditions and communities in America in the near future.

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