

Marcus Bingenheimer. *Der Münchsehrte Yinshun (* 1906) und seine Bedeutung für den Chinesisch-Taiwanischen Buddhismus im 20. Jahrhundert.* Heidelberg: edition forum, 2004. 343 pp. No price listed, paper, ISBN 978-3-927943-26-1.

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Modern Chinese Buddhism (or, the modernization of Chinese Buddhism) has been steadily moving up on the research agenda in recent years. After the pioneering efforts of Holmes Welch in the 1960s and 1970s, there was a period of more than twenty years during which Western-language publications were few and far between. But it was during just this time that important new perspectives were emerging, primarily in the Buddhist communities of Taiwan where many important *sangha* leaders had fled from the mainland after 1949. The Republic of China on Taiwan became a kind of laboratory for the development of a modern Chinese Buddhism, with different versions concocted by major figures such as Shengyan (1930-), Xingyun (1927-), Zhengyan (1937-), and Weijue (1928-). They are the founders of the Four Major Mountains (*si dashan*), that is, the four largest and most influential Buddhist organizations in Taiwan. By the 1990s, the immense success of these leading figures and organizations in revitalizing and redefining Taiwanese Buddhism began to attract the attention of a growing number of Western scholars. Studies appeared on major figures such as Taixu (1889-1947), the inspiration of many of the Taiwanese Buddhist modernizers, and Xingyun, the founder of the *Foguang* (Buddha Light) movement.[1] Overviews of the world of Taiwanese Buddhism in the twentieth century were provided by Marcus Günzel,

Charles B. Jones,
and André Laliberté .[2]

The work under review adds to this evolving picture by focusing on a *sangha* figure who is less prominent in the public view of Taiwanese Buddhism, but nevertheless influential through his impact on Buddhist scholarship and education.[3] A disciple of Taixu, Yinshun has propagated his master's version of engaged Buddhism and is known for this promotion of what he terms "Buddhism for the Human Realm" (*renjian Fojiao*). However, in this new study, Marcus Bingenheimer claims that Yinshun's truly original contribution lies elsewhere, namely in his historical scholarship. Yinshun has produced numerous studies on the historical development primarily of Indian Buddhism, which he sees culminating in Nāgārjuna's *Madhyamaka* philosophy. Distancing himself from any sectarian affiliations, Yinshun, already in the 1930s and 1940s, had taken a broader view of Buddhist history and tried to locate and evaluate Chinese Buddhism within that wider perspective.

His methodology is an interesting mix of Western historiographical approaches and traditional Buddhist models, which allows him to go beyond the received truths of tradition, even while harnessing the insights thus gained for very traditional purposes. For him, the knowledge gained through historical inquiry and text-critical

scholarship is never an end in itself, but always a means to achieve deeper insight into the "Buddha dharma" (*fofa*). This point is made in a seminal essay of 1954, "*Yi fofa yanjiu fofa*" ("Studying Buddha Dharma by Means of Buddha Dharma"), which Bingenheimer translates in full in the appendix of his book (pp. 284-301). Here scholarship is understood to serve the attainment of true insight; in fact, for Yinshun as an admirer of Nāgārjuna it is the primary path towards awakening, superior to other methods such as Pure Land devotion or tantric practice, which operate at the level of *upāya* at best. Through his works and his exemplary life as a scholar-monk, Yinshun thus breathes new life into a Chinese scholastic tradition that had been overshadowed since the Song period by the more practice-oriented schools of Chan and Pure Land.

Bingenheimer presents a systematic overview of Yinshun's life and work, with particular attention paid to the methodology and hermeneutics of his scholarship. We see Yinshun growing up intellectually in institutions inspired by Taixu and sharpening his skills in the lively debates that characterized the *sangha* on the Chinese mainland in the 1930s and 1940s. After his move from Hong Kong to Taiwan in 1953, he established two educational institutions that would help spread his ideas through the Buddhist community: the *Fuyan Vihara* in Hsinchu and the *Huiri* Lecture Hall in Taipei. In 1980 this set-up was supplemented by a publishing house, the Zhengwen *chubanshe*. The size of these institutions is very modest when compared to the facilities of the Four Major Mountains, but this just serves to demonstrate further that Yinshun's real influence is in the realm of ideas rather than that of organizations. And his ideas certainly have made themselves felt, directly through Yinshun's publications and lectures, and indirectly through his very active disciples who have been inspired by them to strike out on their own in various directions, in

the process often going beyond the positions of their master.

Bingenheimer gives the example of the current debate about the Eight Rules of Respect (*ba-jingfa*), which codify the subordination of nuns to the male *sangha*. Taking up feminist impulses, several of Yinshun's students, led by the nun Zhaohui, are extremely vocal in calling for the abolition of these rules, thereby going much further than Yinshun would commit himself publicly. Thus, even as Yinshun's birthday is celebrated every year with major scholarly symposia (one of which I happened to attend as an onlooker in the spring of 2002 at the Academia Sinica in Taipei), some scholars are speaking of the dawn of a "post-Yinshun era." However, I suspect that Yinshun would see the fact that his work is slowly being superseded by the efforts of a new generation of nuns and monks as proof of his ultimate success. If scholarship and mental effort are the path to awakening, then he could never wish to have his findings enshrined as final, sacred truth. True disciples will show their mettle by taking the master's ideas and going beyond them, much as Yinshun did in his relationship with Taixu.

Bingenheimer provides a comprehensive survey of this important figure, without whom a proper understanding of modern Taiwanese Buddhism would be impossible. An introduction reviewing the current state of the field (chapter 1) is followed by an overview of Yinshun's life and work on the mainland and in Hong Kong until 1952, with special consideration of his relationship with Taixu (chapter 2). Chapter 3 surveys Yinshun's activities in Taiwan, ending with an assessment of his current position there. Chapter 4 focuses on his "methodology and hermeneutics," before the whole book is neatly summed up in chapter 5. That is not the end of it yet, though, as the reader is further treated to a transcript of a 2001 "interview" with a rather whimsical Master Yinshun, and to three translated excerpts from Yinshun's writings: the preface to his *Yindu Fojiao*

sixiangshi (History of Thought of Indian Buddhism), the chapter on Nāgārjuna from that same work, and the already mentioned essay "*Yi fofa yanjiu fofa*" ("Studying Buddha Dharma by Means of Buddha Dharma"). The Nāgārjuna chapter is translated into English, the other three texts are rendered in German.

The book is rounded out by an annotated bibliography of Yinshun's major works, a list of works cited, an English abstract, and an index. The presence of the index is worth noting as it demonstrates that more than the usual care has gone into the publication of what is actually a dissertation submitted at the University of Würzburg in 2004. German dissertations need to be formally published before a doctoral degree is conferred. Often this is treated as a mere formality and the publication requirement is satisfied by putting the dissertation between book covers, giving it an ISBN, and then running off the minimum number of copies required. Not so in this case: while the book does contain its share of typographical errors that a more professional copyediting process would have caught, it is largely unencumbered by the usual dissertationese and reads well as a scholarly monograph. Anyone interested in the dynamic developments happening in modern Taiwanese Buddhism will profit from it. It adds to the growing corpus of German-language scholarship in this field which anglophone academics cannot afford to ignore any more.

Notes

[1]. For example, on Taixu, see Gotelind Mähler, *Buddhismus und Moderne: Ouyang Jingwu, Taixu und das Ringen um ein zeitgemäßes Selbstverständnis im chinesischen Buddhismus des frühen 20. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1993); and Don Alvin Pittman, *Toward a Modern Chinese Buddhism: Taixu's Reforms* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001). For Xingyun, see Stuart Chandler, *Establishing a Pure Land on Earth: The Foguang Buddhist Perspective on Mod-*

ernization and Globalization (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004).

[2]. Marcus Günzel, *Die Taiwan-Erfahrung des chinesischen Sangha* (Göttingen: Seminar für Indologie und Buddhismuskunde, 1998); Charles B. Jones, *Buddhism in Taiwan: Religion and the State, 1600-1990* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999); and André Laliberté, *The Politics of Buddhist Organizations in Taiwan, 1989-2003: Safeguarding the Faith, Building a Pure Land, Helping the Poor* (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004).

[3]. The English title according to the abstract is, *The Scholar-Monk Yinshun (*1906): His Relevance for the Development of Chinese and Taiwanese Buddhism*.

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