



Passing the Light: The Incense Light Community and Buddhist Nuns in Contemporary Taiwan (Topics in Contemporary Buddhism)

Chun-fang Yu

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The term “revival” has been used to describe the resurgent vitality of Buddhism in Taiwan. Particularly impressive is the quality and size of the nun’s order: Taiwanese nuns today are highly educated and greatly outnumber monks. Both characteristics are unprecedented in the history of Chinese Buddhism and are evident in the Incense Light community (Xiangguang). *Passing the Light* is the first in-depth case study of the community, which was founded in 1974 and remains a small but influential order of highly educated nuns who dedicate themselves to teaching Buddhism to lay adults.

The work begins with a historical survey of Buddhist nuns in China, based primarily on the sixth-century biographical collection *Lives of the Nuns* and stories of nuns in subsequent centuries. This is followed by discussions on the early history of the Incense Light community; the life of Wuyin, one of its most prominent leaders; and the crucial role played by Buddhist studies societies on college campuses, where many nuns were first introduced to Incense Light. Later chapters look at the curriculum and innovative teaching methods at the Incense Light seminary and the nuns’ efforts to teach Buddhism to adults. The work ends with portraits of individual nuns, providing details on their backgrounds, motivations for becoming nuns, and the problems or setbacks they have encountered both within and without the Incense Light community.

This engaging study enriches the literature on the history of Buddhist nuns, seminaries, and education, and will find an appreciative audience among scholars and students of Chinese religion, especially Buddhism, as well as those interested in questions of religion and modernity and women and religion.

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