

A Critical Review of Introductory Writings on Buddhist Publications in Taiwan over the Last Sixty Years

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Abstract

For those interested in Buddhism, a good introductory guide is essential. However, such a work did not exist before the founding of the Republic of China in 1912. The first introductory book on Buddhism that ever appeared in China was compiled by Xie Meng in 1916. Following Master Tai Xu's *An Introduction to Buddhism* (1930), a large number of similar publications came into being, gaining popularity among people interested in learning about Buddhist thought. Generally speaking, the goal of this kind of writing is to encapsulate the gist of Buddhism for the general public and foster a correct and complete understanding of Buddhist concepts. Authors of this type of publication not only need to have a full understanding of the entire collection of the Buddhist canon—they also need to select, classify, and analyze objectively the contents of the canon and refer to contemporary studies to come up with a logical, all-embracing Buddhist theoretical system. However, if we look at the Buddhist guidebooks published in Taiwan over the past 60 years (it would be 70 years if we counted from Xie Meng), we will find that almost all of the publications fail to measure up. We still do not have a truly good basic book that would meet the needs of the many introductory courses on Buddhism taught in the departments of philosophy, Chinese literature, and general education at universities throughout Taiwan. Without access to a well-written textbook, the quality of these courses is likely to suffer.

This article reviews the various introductory writings on Buddhist thought published in Taiwan over the past 60 years. In addition to pointing out the strengths and weaknesses of these publications, the article tries to articulate the necessary points that should be included in a good introductory book on Buddhism. The article also discusses the important topic of “Different Stages of Spiritual Development” that outlines point by point the various stages of spiritual cultivation for beginners. It is a subject of great significance that calls for the attention of Buddhist scholars and it will be covered in the fifth section of the article.

Keywords: Introduction to Buddhism, Different Stages of Spiritual Development, Semantic Web for Buddhism