

The Practice of Deference and Its Politics: Theravada Buddhist Beliefs and Hierarchical Dynamism in China's Southwest Border Areas*

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In this article I examine the dynamics of religious and political hierarchies in Wa Buddhists' practice of Theravada Buddhist beliefs in the Autonomous County of Cangyuan, Wa Nationality, in China's southwest border region. Communities of Wa Buddhists in Cangyuan have gone through a number of historical phases for which the notion of "hierarchical dynamism" (Robbins 2015), is a useful theoretical framework for understanding, in particular, the workings of complex, multilayered hierarchical relations in the local history of religious conversion and practice. Here the symbolic role of the Wa king and the agentive role of senior Wa orators illustrate a feature of nested hierarchies by which the political and religious domains are contested and juxtaposed over time. In particular, the Wa deferential greetings performed by senior orators are not only confined and grounded in the religious field, but also feed into the hierarchical dynamics by which community tensions and conflicts are managed, where political distrust is expressed, and where social relations are reconfigured in light of local ethnolinguistic practices and ideas of *nbuan* (merit).

Keywords: hierarchical dynamism, Theravada Buddhist beliefs, religious conversion, deference, Wa Buddhists

恭敬的實踐及其政治： 中國西南邊境地區佯族人的南傳佛教信仰與階序動態

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本文探討生活於中緬邊境的滄源佯族自治縣內信仰南傳佛教佯族人的宗教階序和政治階序關係的動態歷史和文化實踐，說明他們以*nbuan*（佛教功德）和恭敬觀念的文化詮釋方式和儀式行動來理解佯王政權和當代政治階序關係。本文以「階序動態」（Robbins 2015）的理論，說明佛教階序與政治階序是緊張、相互涵括的關係，以及兩種階序的相疊性。以佯王主導的佛教改宗是因十九世紀末期中緬邊境地區的民族衝突而起，佯族採納了傣族的南傳佛教信仰，但最終以佯族人來傳承佛教知識和管理佛寺。1952年之後，佯王統治權力被中國的政權所取代，他原享有最高的宗教地位也被中國政府禁止。中國文革之後，當代佯族人透過每年舉辦的儀式行動來記憶和彰顯佯王擁有最崇高*nbuan*的象徵地位。階序動態的關係也展現在漢族高層官員造訪佯族村寨的場合，當地男性儀式專家會以恭敬儀式來歡迎官員，並將官員視為擁有較高的*nbuan*，但對於同時出席的村委會佯族幹部們，佯族老人卻避免使恭敬語彙來稱呼他們。本文提出佯族人的南傳佛教階序和政治階序不是時間靜止或固定的結構關係，在不同歷史脈絡中，階序關係是動態形成和相疊的，以*nbuan*為主的文化價值系統和佛教階觀念是佯族人的儀式行動準則，並成為他們理解和批判當代佯族農村政治階序的文化方式。

關鍵詞：階序動態，南傳佛教信仰，佛教改宗，恭敬，信仰佛教的佯族人