

The Dissemination of I-Kuan Tao in Thailand

In the 1970s, I-Kuan Tao was introduced into Thailand, and it spread quickly across the whole country. According to data, there were more than 7000 established I-Kuan Tao Buddhist halls in Thailand in 2009, and the numbers are still increasing. However, I-Kuan Tao is not a homogenous sect, but is divided into many “lines.” As I-Kuan Tao was disseminated in a variety of ways across Thailand, each line developed differently. This summer, I visited Buddhist halls belonging to two lines in particular, and I will introduce them now.

The “T line” now has two centers in Thailand, that is, in Bangkok and in Chiang Mai. These two centers are still under instruction from their founders in Taiwan. Every two months, Masters from Taiwan visit to take care of the two centers.

I visited the center in Chiang Mai. Usually there are events from Friday to Sunday, including training in how to worship the gods, religious courses being taught, or initiation rites for newcomers. However, when I was there, the only event in progress was a religious course on Saturday, which only around ten people joined.

Currently, a big issue for believers is how to attract more believers. Last year, they recruited two local Masters. One is ethnically Karen, working in a massage school. She often invites her foreign students to the initiation rite. However, some criticize this, because these students do not understand the full religious meaning of what they are doing. The other Master is ethnically Yunnan Chinese, and is the owner of a factory. She usually asks her

ethnically Wa employees to pass the initiation rite to become believers. However, after that, those employees are not interested in learning Mandarin or participating in the religious courses. Are those local Masters being effective in developing the T line? We need to observe further in order to assess this effectively.

The other Line, the “L line,” came to Thailand in 1980. Now there are around 60 public Buddhist halls (centers) and there might be over 1000 Buddhist family or home halls across Thailand. They are divided into ten areas in Thailand. Each area has its own leaders and development, but they also interact with and help each other.

Unlike the T line, there are already many Thai Masters in the L line. Although they may normally be based in Bangkok or central areas, they will go to other provinces for the initiation rites ceremonies or to take care of the Buddhist halls there. There are also many events or courses held in centers in Bangkok, and sometimes hundreds of believers or even over a thousand from all over Thailand come to Bangkok for these events.

When I visited the Buddhist halls in Bangkok and areas of lower Northeast Thailand, I encountered a major new plan called “Cultivating Morality Class.” Its aim is to teach children morality. At the same time, it also helps to cultivate the believers of the next generation.

The Buddhist Hall of the T Line in Chiang Mai



Moral education of children in the L Line Buddhist Hall in Mudahan

