Wei-Yi Cheng

9 Transitioning the Vietnamese Ullambana Festival to Taiwan

This paper will discuss three Vietnamese Ullambana Festivals ("Vu Lan" in Vietnamese) that took place in Taiwan in August/September 2018. My discussion will focus on the translocative elements of the Vietnamese Buddhist network in Taiwan and the influence of modernism on the ritual performance of the Vietnamese Ullambana Festival.

The Ullambana Festival is frequently translated as the "Ghost Festival" and associated with Chinese Buddhism. One good example is Stephen Teiser's *The Ghost Festival in Medieval China*,[1] which offers an English translation of the Chinese *Ullambana Sutra*[2] and insights into the mythological and social discourse of the Ullambana Festival in medieval China. The core idea is to conduct offerings to the sangha and then transfer the merit gained from this to one's deceased relatives, ancestors or even unrelated hungry ghosts. But the Ullambana Festival is not exclusively Chinese Buddhist: similar rituals can be found in Southeast Asian countries such as Laos[3] and Cambodia.[4] When the Chinese *Ullambana Sutra* was transmitted to Vietnam is unknown; but reports of the Ullambana Festival in Vietnam can be found as early as the fifteenth century.[5] It has remained popular in Vietnamese Buddhism to this day.[6]

Little has been written about Vietnamese Buddhism in Taiwan despite the rapid growth of the Vietnamese diaspora in Taiwan since the 1990s, partly as a result of transnational marriages and also due to the migration of labourers.

1 S.F. Teiser, *The Ghost Festival in Medieval China*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.

2 *Foshuo yulanpen jing* 佛說盂蘭盆經 [The Ullambana Sutra Spoken by the Buddha], CBETA, T16n0685.

3 P. Ladwig, "Feeding the Dead: Ghosts, Materiality and Merit in a Lao Buddhist Festival for the Deceased", in: J.C. Holt, J.N. Kinnard, and J.S. Walters (eds.), *Constituting Communities: Theravada Buddhism and the Religious Cultures of South and Southeast Asia*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003, pp. 119–141.

4 J.C. Holt, *Theravada Traditions: Buddhist Ritual Cultures in Contemporary Southeast Asia and Sri Lanka*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2017, pp. 239–308.

5 M.C. Dinh et al., *The History of Buddhism in Vietnam*, Washington, DC: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2008, p. 170.

6 Thanh-Tri Phan 釋善香, "*Foshuo yulanpen jing* yu qi xiaodaoguan zai Yuenan de liuchuan 《佛說盂蘭盆經》與其孝道觀在越南的流傳" [The Spread of the Ullambana Sutra Spoken by the Buddha and its Notion of Filial Piety in Vietnam], MA thesis, Ming Chuan University, 2012.

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110690101-009

The relatively large Vietnamese diaspora in Taiwan creates a demand for religious services. Yu's survey of devotees of a Vietnamese Buddhist group in central Taiwan, one of the few studies on this subject, finds that Buddhism provides social support, emotional security as well as the comforting belief in the salvation of one's deceased relatives.[7]

Translocative Network

Today, it is difficult to think of a religion that is "bounded" within national borders. Even the small, rural Buddhist temples that I have visited in Taiwan or Sri Lanka have some kind of transnational connection. It is even more so with Vietnamese Buddhism in Taiwan. The concept of "translocality" highlights the importance of local-to-local connections in transnational religion and permits an "agency-oriented" approach to the migration experience.[8]

I will call the case-studies in this paper "translocative networks". As Tweed has argued, "[r]eligious flows – and the traces they leave – move through time and space [. . .]. They change over time and move across space."[9] "Translocative" is a more abstract term than "translocal", which means the connection between different places that are normally within a nation state.[10] The three cases discussed here are "translocal" because all the monastic actors involved do not live in their temples in Taiwan but in students' dormitories in various universities, and their traveling from one node (dormitories) to another (temples) to provide religious services at weekends and during holidays creates translocality. Although they are "translocal", they are also "translocative", since they bring the Vietnamese Ullambana Festival across time and space to Taiwan. "Network", it emerged in the Leipzig workshop, refers to "a patterning device that allows us to

7 Yu M. 俞明仁, "Yuenan xinyimin yu fojiao xinyang: yi taiwan yuenan zhide fojiao wenhua jiaoliu xiehui weili 越南新移民與佛教信仰：以「台灣越南智德佛教文化交流協會」為例" [Vietnamese New Immigrants and Buddhist Belief: A Case Study of the Taiwan-Vietnam Zhide Buddhist Cultural Exchange Association], *Yuan Kuang Journal of Buddhist Studies* (December 2017), pp. 135–198.

8 K. Brickell and A. Datta, "Introduction: Translocal Geographies", in: K. Brickell and A. Datta (eds.), *Translocal Geographies: Spaces, Places, Connections*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2011, p. 3.

9 T.A. Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006, pp. 62–64.

10 I am grateful to Jens Reinke for pointing this out to me. Personal communication, 17 January 2019.

visualize transnational religious spaces as nodes and their connecting lines".[11] All three cases are loosely and horizontally connected, without a permanent site in Taiwan and devoid of structural hierarchy (with the exception of Hoang Phap Pagoda, more later) – characteristics that match more with "network" than "organization".

The first case is the only one in the three cases that has a centralized authority or an institutional base – Hoang Phap Pagoda. Hoang Phap Pagoda was founded by the monk Ngo Chan Tu (1901–1988) in Hoc Mon District, Ho Chi Minh City, in 1957.[12] After the decease of the founder, the abbotship of Hoang Phap Pagoda passed to his senior disciple, Thích Chân Tính (b. 1958), who has been instrumental in expanding the works and fame of Hoang Phap Pagoda. According to his disciple, Thích Tâm Luân (b. 1989),[13] Thích Chân Tính claims to be inspired mostly by Vietnamese monks such as Thích Thanh Từ (b. 1924) and Thích Thiện Hoa (1918–1973), but a trip to Taiwan in 1990 inspired him to renovate the method of Dharma propagation. Hoang Phap Pagoda has since become a household name in southern Vietnam. Multimedia, online sermons, Buddhist dramas, retreats, etc. are used to propagate Dharma. Its success can be seen from the fact that twenty thousand people were estimated to have attended its Ullambana Festival in Ho Chi Minh City in 2018. "Hoang Phap" literately means the propagation of Dharma, and its members are encouraged to live up to this ideal. "My Master always encourages us to propagate Dharma", said Thích Tâm Luân, "wherever we go, he wants us to buy a parcel of land and build a temple there." This idea was not realized in Taiwan due to financial difficulties and a lack of interest on the part of Thích Tâm Luân. Having originally come to Taiwan to study Chinese, Thích Tâm Luân stayed on to study for a BA degree. As following up the research in 2019, he has migrated to the United Kingdom, and for the moment, there seems to be no candidate to take his place as the missionary of Hoang Phap Pagoda to Taiwan. But he has no intention of giving up his Vietnamese congregation in Taiwan: during his study in Taiwan, he built up a congregation of Vietnamese followers with whom he met regularly for Dharma lessons and religious services. Although Hoang Phap Pagoda does not have a branch temple in Taiwan, social media enable Thích Tâm Luân to stay in contact with his congregation and continue to run religious activities in Taiwan.

Thích Tâm Luân is not the first Vietnamese monk to manage his congregation in Taiwan through social media. My second case relates to a congregation founded

11 Philip Clart, personal communication, 24 December 2018.

12 "Chua Hoang Phap", https://www.chuahoangphap.com.vn/en/ (accessed September – November 2018), author unknown.

13 My main informant.

by a Vietnamese monk who no longer lives in Taiwan. Thích Minh Tuệ too came to Taiwan as a student and founded the congregation of "Tuệ Quang" ("benevolent light") in Taichung (a city in central Taiwan). But he returned to Vietnam upon graduation in 2016. The difficulty of obtaining a residence visa means that few Vietnamese student-monastics can stay on in Taiwan after graduation. Since then, Tuệ Quang has been run by a fellow Vietnamese monastic student, Thích Đồng Lợi (b. 1984).[14] In the narrative of the Tuệ Quang congregation, Thích Minh Tuệ remains the abbot, and he travels to Taiwan every month to preside over religious functions. Thích Đồng Lợi is understood to be a mere minister of the congregation. He too came to Taiwan as a student and did not know Thích Minh Tuệ prior to their encounter in Taiwan. The two monks met at a Buddhist ritual and Thích Đồng Lợi was subsequently entrusted with the ministry of Tuệ Quang.

The third case constitutes an even clearer instance of a network. Phổ Bi ("universal compassion") was founded by a group of Vietnamese monastic students in New Taipei City in 2013. While studying in Taiwan, they were approached by Vietnamese migrants with a request for religious services. In 2013 they rented an old apartment unit and founded a "temple" named Phổ Bi. Those who originally founded Phổ Bi have already left Taiwan, but the ministry of Phổ Bi is continued by other Vietnamese monastic students. They host religious services and Dharma study classes every weekend, important religious rituals regularly (i.e. the Lunar New Year Festival and Ullambana Festival), and occasionally charity work (e.g. a food drive for the homeless, services for Vietnamese spouses in transnational marriages, etc.). The Vietnamese monastic students study at different universities and did not necessarily know one another prior to studying in Taiwan. The need for a sufficient number of monastics to perform religious services has led to the emergence of a network in which Vietnamese monastic students gain acquaintance with one and another. The network is formed through word-of-mouth, personal connection with other monastic students studying in the same institute, and through social media. The abbot of Phổ Bi is elected among the core of Vietnamese monastic students each year, but there is no formal structure of Phổ Bi. The monastic members come and go and it is difficult to estimate the size of monastic membership at any given time.

Although some former Vietnamese monastic students have founded more permanent religious organizations in Taiwan, the number is small. Taiwan's unfriendly immigration policy means that it is difficult for the monastic students mentioned here to envision pursuing a religious career in Taiwan – though not entirely impossible. I am currently conducting fieldwork with a Vietnamese

14 My student at Fo Guang University and a key informant.

Buddhist group in Taiwan, founded by a Vietnamese Buddhist nun who is in Taiwan on a student visa, but has invited another Vietnamese Buddhist nun to Taiwan on a missionary visa for the ministry of her organization. The Vietnamese founder nun claims that she has a long-term plan for her organization in Taiwan. Because the fieldwork is still at an early stage, this fourth group cannot be analysed here.

It has been suggested that to understand transnational religion is to "to trace the flow of people, rituals, artefacts, beliefs, and institutions across spatial and temporal boundaries".[15] The flow of people, especially the Vietnamese householder-migrants, plays a crucial role in setting up the network of transnational Vietnamese Buddhism in Taiwan. Even Hoang Phap Pagoda did not start its religious activities in Taiwan with a missionary agenda. The monastic founders of the three cases discussed above began to operate in Taiwan only after being approached by Vietnamese householder-migrants. In the field of Buddhist Studies, attention is often given to monastic actors, whereas householder-actors are often neglected. However, in the three cases discussed here, householder-actors are fundamental in creating the translocative flow. The majority of devotees in all three cases are Vietnamese women who come originally from southern or central Vietnam and are married to Taiwanese men; the few northern Vietnamese are mostly male migrant-workers. Religious work in the three cases also serves a cultural/social purpose, by creating a "home away from home". As we will see in the next section, Vietnamese householders are translocative actors, who may live in different locations in Taiwan and travel for religious work. The monastics are also translocative actors. One commonality among the three cases is that they are all set up by Vietnamese monastic students who travel to Taiwan to study. Instead of living at their "temples" in Taiwan, they live at student residences at different universities across Taiwan and only travel to their "temples" to conduct a service at weekends or during the holidays. Both the monastics and householders travel not just across national-borders but also within Taiwan. Through the flow of Vietnamese actors, a translocative network is formed and enables the actors to be transported back to a Vietnamese spatial setting while still being in Taiwan. This is what Tweed calls "crossing and dwelling", to "make meaning and negotiate power as they appeal to contested historical traditions of storytelling, object making, and ritual performance in order to make homes (*dwelling*) and cross boundaries (*crossing*)".[16]

15 T.A. Tweed, "Theory and Method in the Study of Buddhism: Toward 'Translocative' Analysis", *Journal of Global Buddhism* 12 (2011), p. 23.

16 Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, p. 74.

Ullambana Festival 2018

All three Ullambana Festivals discussed here took place in Taiwan in August/September 2018. Although the Ullambana Festival is supposed to take place on the fifteenth day of the seventh lunar month,[17] contemporary practical considerations (e.g. the need for devotees to be off from work in order to participate in the ritual) mean that the Ullambana Festival need not necessarily take place on the traditionally designated date. In all of the cases discussed here the Ullambana Festival was shifted to a weekend. All three cases exhibit elements of translocative religion, namely, the creation of sacroscapes (spatial) and the shifting of ritual narrative (temporal).

Creation of Sacroscapes

The term "sacroscapes" is borrowed from Tweed to suggest that "religious confluences, are not static. They are not fixed, built environments."[18] The characteristics of sacroscapes are very apparent in the three cases, for none of the people concerned was able to conduct the Ullambana Festival in their own sacred places in Taiwan. Although all three rent apartment units in Taiwan to conduct a small but regular religious service, for an event as big as the Ullambana Festival, ritual spaces had to be borrowed. For the festival, Hoang Phap Pagoda rented an auditorium in a public library in New Taipei City, and Tuệ Quang rented a community centre auditorium in Taichung. By so doing, they transformed what is normally a secular space into a sacroscape where a sacred religious ceremony could be performed. This transformation takes the form of sacred objects and network of religious professionals.

Religious objects, endowed with a sense of sacredness can bring a feeling of awe to devotees and thus transform the space from something mundane to something holy. That is, "*artifacts* anchor the tropes, values, emotions, and beliefs that institutions transmit, and [. . .] the religious create artifacts and prescribe procedures for their use."[19] In the cases of Hoang Phap Pagoda and Tuệ Quang, the organizer-monks brought in their own Buddha images and bright yellow[20] cloths for the ritual. Once the bright yellow cloths covered the tables

17 A. Cole, *Mothers and Sons in Chinese Buddhism*, Paolo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1998, p. 87.
18 Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, p. 61.
19 Ibid., p. 68.
20 A symbolic colour of Buddhism.

and a Buddha image and flowers had been placed on the tables, a sacred shrine was immediately created. In the case of Tuệ Quang, images of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara and Bodhisattva Kṣitigarbha were also placed on tables on either side of the Buddha image, and Buddhist flags were brought in to decorate the place. Through decoration with sacred objects, a mundane place was transformed into a sacred space where one of the most important rituals in Mahayana Buddhism can be performed. This space is temporary and fluid and therefore best described as a "sacroscape".

Sacred objects alone do not make the ritual function: it is only with religious professionals that sacroscapes can commence ritual performance. Monks from Vietnam were invited to hold Ullambana Festivals in Taiwan. The abbot of Hoang Phap Pagoda, Thích Chân Tính, led more than a dozen monks (and more than one hundred householder-devotees) from Vietnam for the Ullambana Festival in Taiwan. The founder monk of Tuệ Quang, Thích Minh Tuệ, also travelled from Vietnam to Taichung to perform the Ullambana Festival.

National border-crossing is only one aspect of the monastic network. Vietnamese monks and nuns from different monastic lineages, traditions,[21] and localities in Taiwan joined the ritual performance in all three cases. They were monastic students who normally lived in different colleges or universities around Taiwan but were invited to perform Ullambana Festivals. The presence of senior monks and a large number of other monastics no doubt attracted Vietnamese devotees, not only because Buddhists believe that offering to sangha members accumulates the most merit[22] but also because in the *Ullambana Sutra*, offering to sangha is prescribed by the Buddha as the mode of salvation for the dead.[23] The Ullambana Festival of Hoang Phap Pagoda attracted more than five hundred attendees, and Tuệ Quang estimated to have had over three hundred attendees.

These attendees were mostly Vietnamese migrants, either migrant workers or women married to Taiwanese men. Because they were late migrants, there is no animosity between migrants from North and South Vietnam, as one might find among earlier Vietnamese immigrant groups in the West. Interestingly, the attendees were not limited to residents of a particular locality (New Taipei City in the case of Hoang Phap Pagoda or Taichung City in the case of Tuệ Quang). I met a Vietnamese woman in both festivals who informed me that she and a

21 In the case of Tuệ Quang, a Theravāda monastic student from Bangladesh also participated in the ritual.

22 P. Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics: Foundations, Values and Issues*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 391.

23 Cole, *Mothers and Sons*, p. 59.

few friends kept track of Vietnamese Buddhist events in Taiwan through social media and would travel to as many rituals as possible. Vietnamese Buddhist rituals made her, as she said, "feel like at home". Another group of devotees hired a bus and travelled from Taipei to Taichung for the Ullambana Festival of Tuệ Quang. They also kept track of Vietnamese Buddhist events in Taiwan through social media.

But it is the case of Phổ Bi that is most telling in terms of networking. Phổ Bi borrowed the sacred space of a Chinese Buddhist temple – Shandao Nunnery – for the Ullambana Festival. Shandao Nunnery is situated in New Taipei City in what now an industrial area, where many foreign migrant workers congregate. Its abbess, Ven. Zhaoding 照定 (b. 1944),[24] came to know several Vietnamese monastic students some years ago and has since offered her temple as a lodging place for Vietnamese monastic students during their off-semester time. If "[d]iasporas are webs, and webs consist not only of fibres or ropes, but also of nodes that link them together",[25] the small apartment unit of Phổ Bi was the first nodal point to link Vietnamese Buddhists, and the Shandao Nunnery offers another nodal point for important rituals to take place. Moreover, the "web" is expanding to Vietnam and to Canada, thanks to the World Wide Web.

One of the regular monastics of Phổ Bi[26] is an acquaintance of the well-known Vietnamese-Canadian monk Thích Pháp Hòa (b. 1974) and made the suggestion of inviting him to preside at the Ullambana Festival. Thích Pháp Hòa was born in Vietnam and is currently the abbot of Truc Lam Monastery in Edmonton, Canada.[27] Through his charismatic Dharma sermons, which are broadcast on the internet, Thích Pháp Hòa has become well known and has followers around the world. Having accepted the invitation, Thích Pháp Hòa became the centre of Phổ Bi's Ullambana Festival (see below). He was accompanied to Taiwan by more

24 "Di shiyijie lishizhang: Zhaoding Fashi 第十一屆理事長:照定法師" [The 11th Chairperson – Ven. Zhaoding], New Taipei City Buddhist Association, http://www.buddha-nt.org.tw/product_detail/land-ctop-2/index.php?Product_SN=210708&PHPSESSID=&Company_SN=500320&Product_Site_Classify_SN=46818 (accessed 23 November 2018), author unknown.

25 D. Haller, "Let It Flow: Economy, Spirituality, and Gender in the Sindhi Network", in: W. Kokot, K. Tölölyan, and C. Alfonso (eds.), *Diaspora, Identity and Religion: New Directions in Theory and Research*, London: Routledge, 2004, p. 195.

26 Phổ Bi has no membership structure. The Abbot is elected among Vietnamese monastic students by popular vote every year, but most monastic students come and go. It is therefore difficult to speak of an "official" membership.

27 "Happy Life – Thich Phap Hoa (Lac Viet Pagoda, Taipei, Taiwan on September 15, 2018)", *Tu Viện Trúc Lâm*, 23 November 2018, https://www.thayphaphoa.com/song-hanh-phuc-thay-thich-phap-hoa-chua-lac-viet-dai-bac-taiwan-ngay-15-9-2018/ (accessed 27 November 2018), author unknown.

than two hundred devotees from Vietnam and more than one hundred members of the Vietnamese diaspora who lived in North America and Europe. Thích Pháp Hòa's arrival at Taiwan's airport, where he was greeted by almost one hundred devotees, was streamed live on Facebook.

Phổ Bi's Ullambana Festival was the biggest of the three cases, with more than one thousand attendees. Most were Vietnamese, with a few Taiwanese devotees of Shandao Nunnery. Phổ Bi's extensive network of people links Vietnamese devotees and monastics in different glocalities.

With its connection to the local Buddhist establishment (Shandao Nunnery), the sacroscape was crafted from an existing Buddhist sacred space rather than being created from a secular space. The transformation was not from secular to sacred but from Chinese to Vietnamese Buddhism, with Vietnamese Buddhist objects decorating the sacred space of Shandao Nunnery. As in the other two cases considered here, the sacred space is fluid, crafted at the time of need and transformed back to its original state after the ritual performance. This flow of sacroscapes, which are not a fixed or specially built sacred environment, can be understood as "translocative".

Another interesting commonality in the three cases is the flow of religious tourism: both the monastic and the householder actors travelled for more than merely attending the ritual. The religious actors are known to travel for the purpose of missionary work and pilgrimage,[28] but in the Vietnamese Buddhist network, the householder-actors also travel for tourism. Vietnamese householder-devotees did not travel with their monastic masters to Taiwan merely for participation in the Ullambana Festival, but stayed in Taiwan beyond the duration of the festival and visited various tourist and Buddhist sites, thus participating in "religious tourism" in the truest sense.

Shifting of Ritual Narrative

The term Ullambana Festival is traditionally translated into English as "Ghost Festival" and understood as transferring merit to deceased relatives and hungry ghosts, thus enabling their salvation.[29] A more traditional way of performing the Ullambana Festival, which emphasizes the salvation of the deceased, still

28 Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, pp. 128–131.

29 Teiser, *The Ghost Festival in Medieval China*, p. 3.

exists in Vietnam,[30] but the ritual performance in all three cases was relatively short, entertaining, and with a focus upon the narrative of filial piety.

Due to the practical concern that householders may have little free time off from home and/or work, two of the Ullambana Festivals discussed here were held at weekends and purposely shortened to 3–4 hours. The exception was Phổ Bi: since its performance took place in a Buddhist temple (rather than a secular space), its ritual performance included the traditional three-day chanting of Buddha's name and the *Ullambana Sutra*, and its main ritual performance lasted a whole day (Table 9.1). All three ritual performances were entertaining in comparison to the Chinese Buddhist Ullambana Festival performed in contemporary Taiwan. The Hoang Phap Pagoda and Phổ Bi invited professional Vietnamese singers to perform at their Ullambana Festivals, and in all three cases poetry reading and rose pinning took place, drawing tears from many attendees. According to Phan and my informants, ever since Thích Nhất Hạnh (b. 1926) in 1962 published his poem, *A Rose for Your Pocket*,[31] which recounts parental kindness and sacrifice for one's children, poetry reading, and the pinning of roses on the attendees' clothes to commemorate their parents have been part of the ritual performance of the Vietnamese Ullambana Festival.[32] The Ullambana Festival is sometimes called "Mother's Day" in contemporary Vietnam.

Table 9.1: Phổ Bi's Ullambana Festival Schedule, 16 September 2018.

8:00 a.m.	**Arrival**
9:00 a.m.	Dharma talk by Ven. Thích Pháp Hòa
10:30 a.m.	Vu Lan (Ullambana) ritual
12:00 p.m.	Vegetarian lunch
2:00 p.m.	*Sutra*-chanting & transferring merit
3:00 p.m.	Dharma talk by Ven. Thích Pháp Hòa
4:30 p.m.	Taking refugees in triple-gems
5:30 p.m.	Supper
6:30 p.m.	Buddhist songs concert (by Vietnamese pop singers)

30 Phan, "*Foshuo yulanpen jing* yu qi xiaodaoguan zai Yuenan de liuchuan".

31 English translation, see Thich Nhat Hanh, *A Rose for Your Pocket: An Appreciation of Motherhood*, Surry Hills, Australia: ReadHowYouWant, Large Print Books, 2012.

32 Phan, "*Foshuo yulanpen jing* yu qi xiaodaoguan zai Yuenan de liuchuan", pp. 96–104.

The contemporary Vietnamese Ullambana Festival constitutes a manifestation of Buddhist modernism. McMahan cites Thích Nhất Hạnh as one of the figures responsible for making Buddhist modernism and popularizing the modernist version of Buddhism throughout the world.[33] Buddhist modernism is a response to Western colonial incursion and a reassertion of Buddhist values, one of its tactics being to de-emphasize rituals.[34] Poetry reading, rose pinning, and the performance of songs transform the other-worldliness of the Ullambana Festival into this-worldliness by making the ritual entertaining and focusing upon parental kindness. The translocative element is apparent. Thích Nhất Hạnh himself was influenced by Western/modernist discourse and in turn has influenced contemporary Buddhist discourse across national borders.

Table 9.1, taken from Phổ Bi's Ullambana Festival posters, reveals the bias against other-worldly ritual. More time was given to the Dharma talk by Ven. Thích Pháp Hòa than to the performance of *sutra* chanting and the traditional ritual performance associated with salvation of the deceased. The time slot for the "Vu Lan (Ullambana) ritual" in fact contained poetry reading, singing performance, and pinning roses.

Although the ritual of transferring merit to deceased relatives and hungry ghosts was still performed, the narratives of all three cases were predominantly this-worldly. To begin with, in all three cases the Ullambana Festivals was entitled "Ceremony of Vu Lan & Paying Gratitude to One's Parents". In the poems[35] read out to the attendees during the festivals, the attendees were reminded of their dwelling in a foreign country and their inability to be at their parents' side to fulfil the duties of filial piety. The sermon of the abbot of Hoang Phap Pagoda, Thích Chân Tính, encouraged the attendees to pursue a Buddhist life-style and save money to support their parents back in Vietnam. Tuệ Quang's Ullambana Festival included a segment that invited parents and children to go up to the stage and the children then to wash the feet of their parents; many parents were moved to tears during this foot-washing performance. This is understood as a gesture to remember and repay one's parents' kindness. Taken together, the messages sent out from

33 D.L. McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, pp. 6–14.

34 R.K. Payne, "Intertwined Sources of Buddhist Modernist Opposition to Ritual: History, Philosophy, Culture", *Religions* 11 (2018) 9, p. 366, https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/9/11/366/notes (accessed 24 November 2018).

35 Only Hoang Phap Pagoda read out *A Rose for Your Pocket*. The other two cases read out a poem composed by a Vietnamese monastic student who also participated in the Ullambana Festivals of Tuệ Quang and Phổ Bi. His poem also recounts the parental kindness and sacrifice for the children.

the three Ullambana Festivals were this-worldly and emphasized filial piety. In other words, they are demythologized and display the Buddhist modernism[36] that has slowly emerged since the twentieth century. If "[religious] flows, or sacroscapes, are historical as well as geographical" and they "change over time and move across space",[37] the three Ullambana Festivals reflect transtemporal characteristics. By holding the Ullambana Festival, the actors are transported back to the origin of the religion, when the Buddha supposedly gave the instructions concerning the Ullambana Festival. Through the transfer of merit to the deceased, the actors are connected with people of the past; by adopting modernist discourse, they cross and dwell in the time of modernity. These performances were therefore transtemporal.[38]

Conclusion

Because the Ullambana Festival is also a major religious event in my own culture (Chinese Buddhism in Taiwan), it is inevitable that I compare what I observed in the Vietnamese festival in Taiwan to that of Chinese Buddhism. Two points stand out.

Firstly, I was struck by the extensive translocative network and the role of social media. All three cases rely heavily on the translocative network that was generated and enhanced by social media. Vietnamese householder devotees are linked through social media and form a translocative network in which they communicate and travel to various glocalities. The network also makes it possible for Vietnamese monastics from various glocalities to preside over the Ullambana Festivals: whether they reside in Vietnam or in other countries, social media enable them to remain informed of one another's activities transnationally. Even Vietnamese monastic students and householders who lived in different localities in Taiwan and did not know one another prior to the religious event could be solicited through social media. Several monastic students I personally know of attended all three or at least two of the festivals discussed here. The reason given is generally: "There are not enough [Vietnamese] monastics in Taiwan and therefore I come to help." Social media facilitate the information flow and translocative communication, including the maintenance of monastic leadership in the

36 McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, p. 8.

37 Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, p. 64.

38 My gratitude to Thomas Tweed for pointing this out to me. Personal conversation, 13 December 2018.

absence of a corporal presence in Taiwan. This virtual presence both exemplifies and intensifies the translocative networking of Vietnamese Buddhism in Taiwan. The reliance on social media as the means of communication perhaps signals a new pattern of religious network, in which physical location gives way to virtual presence.

Secondly, I was surprised by the extent of temporal crossing in the ritual performance, i.e. the modernist elements. Having grown up in a culture where the ritual of the Ullambana Festival is prescribed in a kind of rule book and still more or less carried out in accordance with rules laid down in medieval China,[39] performance such as poetry-reading, pinning roses, and singing performance at a Ullambana Festival seemed odd to me. The question is why this modernist transformation occurs in the Vietnamese Ullambana Festival but not in my own culture. One might point to the influence of popular and influential monks. The mainland Chinese monks who came to Taiwan after fifty years of Japanese colonization were shocked by the customs and practices of Buddhism in Taiwan, many of which they considered to be heterodox.[40] It became necessary to install what the mainland Chinese monks considered the "orthodox" Chinese Buddhism in Taiwan[41]; hence the strict adherence to the pre-modern rules of ritual performance. On the other hand, all my Vietnamese informants pointed to the role of Thích Nhất Hạnh in the modernist transformation of the Vietnamese Ullambana Festival.

All three cases discussed here share a history of having been founded by Vietnamese Buddhist monastic students, relying heavily on social media and utilizing translocative networking. They are also similar in the doctrine they preach. According to my informants, because their devotees tend to be overwhelmed with work, little time can be spared for Dharma study. Consequently, my monastic informants preached what they considered "surface" Dharma and "easy" practice, namely, Pure Land ritual. The three cases differ in their networking structure. While Hoang Phap Pagoda has a physical home temple in Ho Chi Minh City and its unit in Taiwan functions as its branch-temple, the other two emerged without a home temple back in Vietnam and thus cannot be considered branch-temples. But while the founder monk of Tuệ Quang remains

39 See C. Lin林嘉雯, "Taiwan fojiao yulanpen yigui yu yinyue de shijian 台灣佛教盂蘭盆儀軌與音樂的實踐" [The Buddhist Ullambana Ritual and Music Practice in Taiwan], MA thesis, Tainan National University of the Arts, 2008.

40 Ibid., pp. 112–115.

41 One good example is a book by the popular monk Master Sheng Yen, *Orthodox Chinese Buddhism: A Contemporary Chan Master's Answers to Common Questions*, O. Chang and G. Douglas (trans.), Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2007.

in contact and more or less in control of Tuệ Quang, the founding monks of Phổ Bi have already let go and handed over the ministry of Phổ Bi to the succeeding generation of Vietnamese monastic students. It will be interesting to see how the different networking structures shape the development of the three cases in the future.