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15 Generating Global Pure Lands: *Renjian* Buddhist Civic Engagement within and beyond the Chinese Diaspora Communities Worldwide

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, civic engagements of religious actors in China underwent a series of changes that were linked to the newly emerging nation state project. Facing pressure from Western powers and a modernized Japan, the Chinese aimed to transform their country into a modern nation state. In order to survive, native religious traditions had to adapt to the new circumstances. Facing criticism from modernist intellectuals, Buddhist actors began to emulate Protestant engagements in the fields of education and charity in order to proof the usefulness of their tradition to the modern nation state project. Almost a century later, the Taiwanese *renjian* Buddhist order Fo Guang Shan 佛光山 (Buddha's Light Mountain), founded by the Chinese Buddhist monk Hsing Yun 星雲 (born on 19 August 1927) in 1967, has been able to realize many of the ambitious plans of its early twentieth-century predecessors. Yet instead of confining itself to Taiwan or China, facilitated by global flows of post-1965 Chinese migration, the order has expanded its civic engagement across the whole globe. Former modes of religious civic engagement that were linked to a specific nation state building project have in this process become deterritorialized and adjusted to new settings. Based on ethnographic data, this chapter considers the activities of two Fo Guang Shan overseas temples: the Hsi Lai Temple in Los Angeles, USA and the Nan Hua Temple in Bronkhorstspruit, South Africa. It examines how Fo Guang Shan and its lay wing BLIA (Buddha's Light International Association) through deterritorialized modes of early modern civic engagements have generated a variety of linkages with the mainstream society as well as local Chinese diaspora communities of Fo Guang Shan's new host countries all over

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the globe. Besides contributing to the society of their host countries, Fo Guang Shan's activities overseas are also producing effects back in Taiwan and are noticed in other Asian Buddhist circles. They help Fo Guang Shan to attract donations, and many Fo Guang Shan adherents take great pride in the global contributions of their order. Fo Guang Shan Buddhist civic engagements represent one aspect of the order's social engagement. Others are the modernization of Chinese Buddhist ritual and religious practice and the deployment of notions of Chinese culture. Together they form a particular and very successful mode of modern Chinese Buddhist religiosity.

Native Traditions of Religious Welfare, Colonial Era Transnationalism, and the Dream of China as a Modern Nation State

Long before the advent of modernity in China, religions contributed to society. Throughout Chinese history, a variety of actors – state, religious, and independent – were involved in a multitude of charitable activities. During the late Ming and early Qing, for example, benevolent societies became widespread and supplemented existing forms of charity provided by the state, Buddhist temples, and local shrines.[1] Similarly, folk religious groups that formed around spirit mediums, whose revelations were sometimes collected and published in morality books, were involved in charity work.[2] Traditional Buddhist social work included offering shelter and care for pilgrims, providing relief to the disadvantaged and the needy, but also accepting reformed criminals as monastics or taking in orphans to ordain them as novices.[3]

Yet from the nineteenth century on, with the growing presence of Europeans and Americans in China, new modes of social engagement developed. They represented a departure from late imperial Chinese forms of religiosity in that they merged foreign and native elements and linked religion to the goal of transforming China into a modern nation state.[4] Charitable institutions based on Confucian

1 J.F. Handlin Smith, "Benevolent Societies: The Reshaping of Charity during the Late Ming and Early Ch'ing", *The Journal of Asian Studies* 46 (1987), pp. 309–310.

2 P. Clart, "The Ritual Context of Morality Books: A Case Study of a Taiwanese Spirit-Writing Cult", PhD thesis, University of British Columbia, 1997, p. 41.

3 H. Welch, *The Buddhist Revival in China*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970, pp. 129–130.

4 *Modernity and State Formation*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008, p. 47.

ideals merged with ideas and practices associated with nineteenth- and twentieth-century conceptions of globalized capitalist modernity.[5] In the process of remodelling established Chinese religiosities in order to modernize the country, Western Protestantism often served as a model to emulate. Protestant missionaries in China presented their religion as intrinsically modern. They emphasized how Protestantism, through engagement in the fields of charity and education, contributed to the construction of China as a modern nation state.[6] As of 1914, Christians were running 11,545 elementary schools and 542 universities in China.[7]

Although Buddhists tried to catch up and became involved in education too, they did so on a smaller scale. They modernized the education system of the monastic *sangha*, and some temples also established local community schools.[8] However, it would take Chinese Buddhists until the late 1980s in Taiwan to succeed in establishing their own universities. The Taiwanese order Fo Guang Shan, founded by the Jiangsu-born monastic Hsing Yun in 1967 in the south of Taiwan, was one of the first Buddhist organizations that received permission from the Taiwanese state to realize this aim.[9]

Another way of contributing to society was through charity. Early twentieth-century Buddhists established charities such as orphanages, prison visiting programmes, and small-scale clinics. Holmes Welch identifies a variety of motivations for these new developments in Republican-era Buddhism, ranging from traditional ones rooted in Buddhist and Confucian values to more practical ones like the avoidance of confiscation of temple property by the government, to considerations about the importance of education for the building of the modern nation state. However, he also mentions legal obligations: in 1929 and amplified in 1935, new laws forced monasteries to contribute a certain part of their income to charitable enterprises.[10]

Christian – and in particular Protestant – civic practices and ideas that were introduced to China by Westerners, constituted an important point of reference for the developers of a modern Chinese Buddhist religiosity. Buddhists emulated some Protestant practices and ideas, but also distanced themselves

5 V. Shue, "The Quality of Mercy", *Modern China* 32 (2006), p. 415.

6 V. Goossaert and D.A. Palmer, *The Religious Question in Modern China*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011, p. 77.

7 Ibid.

8 For a thorough examination of the modernization of monastic education, see L.K.R. Lai, "Praying for the Republic: Buddhist Education, Student-Monks, and Citizenship in Modern China (1911–1949)", PhD thesis, McGill University, 2013.

9 Jiang C. 江燦騰, *Renshi taiwan bentu fojiao* 認識臺灣本土佛教 [Understanding Local Taiwanese Buddhism], Taipei: Taiwan shangwu, 2012, p. 110.

10 Welch, *The Buddhist Revival in China*, chap. 7.

from others. In a recent article about Christian influences on *renjian* Buddhism,[11] Yao Yu-Shuang and Richard Gombrich argue that some of the similarities between *renjian* Buddhist and Christian social involvements today can be explained in terms of conscious imitation, while others represent analogous developments that occurred due to similar circumstances.[12] Long Darui too has examined the influence of Christianity on modern Chinese Buddhists. He notes that Hsing Yun's teacher Taixu 太虛 (1890–1947), who is often called the founder of modern Chinese Buddhism, imitated Christian civic practices such as establishing hospitals, orphanages, and schools for his project of a modernized Buddhism.[13] Justin Ritzinger has shown that Taixu merged Western utopianism with more traditional Buddhist religious elements. Taixu reinvented the Maitreya cult, thereby merging traditional Buddhist ritual practices linked to the goal of rebirth in Maitreya's Tuṣita heaven with activist engagement within the secular world.[14] The goal was to enhance society and create a pure land on earth, a goal his student Hsing Yun continues to commit himself to.

However, it is important to add that it was not only the modernizers within the Buddhist sangha who saw the need to adapt to the new circumstances. The more conservative Buddhist mainstream likewise took on what Goossaert and Palmer call the "Christian model" of religiosity. They also drew up plans (albeit not always realised) for the foundation of schools, Buddhist universities, research institutes, welfare programmes, presses and journals, and a corps of missionaries who were supposed to spread the Dharma in the military, in prisons, in hospitals, and abroad.[15]

New forms of Buddhist engagement with society did not simply replace former ones: rather, new amalgams were formed, in which native and foreign elements were combined. China's encounter with an imperialist West had caused the emergence of new forms of religiosity that were linked to the project of strengthening and modernizing the country. In this process, foreign and native

11 *Renjian fojiao* 人間佛教 is often translated by its adherents as "Humanistic Buddhism"; however, in English, the term "humanistic" contains strong connotations of Renaissance humanism. In order to clarify the distinction between the two, I have adopted the romanized Chinese term.

12 Y. Yao and R. Gombrich, "Christianity as Model and Analogue in the Formation of the 'Humanistic' Buddhism of Tài Xū and Hsīng Yún", *Buddhist Studies Review* 34 (2018), at pp. 199–200.

13 D. Long, "An Interfaith Dialogue between the Chinese Buddhist Leader Taixu and Christians", *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 20 (2000), p. 184.

14 J. Ritzinger, *Anarchy in the Pure Land: Reinventing the Cult of Maitreya in Modern Chinese Buddhism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017, p. 123.

15 Goossaert and Palmer, *The Religious Question in Modern China*, p. 82.

concepts and practices were merged in a variety of ways. Contributing to society through education and charity was of significant importance to religious actors if they wanted to adapt to and defend their space in a modernizing China. In other words, the newly evolving, socially engaged modern Buddhist religiosity was based on late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century transnational entanglements with the West. Due to unequal power relations between China and the West, most of the dynamics played out within the Chinese territory. Today, Fo Guang Shan as a contemporary successor of the early Buddhist reformers continues to be involved in – and has even expanded – religiously motivated civic engagement. Yet unlike the Republican-era predecessors, Hsing Yun and his order have not confined themselves to their home region, but extended their engagements to a global scale.

Modern Buddhist Social Engagement as Religious Practice

Contemporary Buddhist groups that are politically progressive and promote causes like pacifism, environmentalism, or human rights, are often labelled as Socially Engaged Buddhists. Yet it is sometimes overlooked how contemporary Buddhist social engagement is linked to earlier, nationalist Buddhist movements in Asia. Jessica L. Main and Rongdao Lai, in an attempt to highlight the linkages and continuities between pre- and post-World War II forms of Buddhist social engagement, provide a revised definition. They argue that more than any particular political agenda, be it pre-war nationalism or post-war pacifism, it is social activity in itself as a form of religious practice that constitutes the core of Socially Engaged Buddhism.[16] This new approach makes it possible to include, amongst other groups, Chinese and Taiwanese *renjian* Buddhists. Building upon the work of Talal Asad, Main and Lai point out that in modern China the secular and the religious as political ideologies have been mutually constitutive categories, imported from the West. Main and Lai define secularization in the Chinese context as "the exercise of power on the part of secular polities to distinguish between the secular and religious in ways that undermine the resources and moral legitimacy of religious actors within the secular".[17] Socially Engaged Buddhism,

16 J.L. Main and R. Lai, "Reformulating 'Socially Engaged Buddhism' as an Analytical Category", *The Eastern Buddhist* 44 (2013), p. 4.
17 Ibid.

including *renjian* Buddhism, is a response to this process. It constitutes the "mirror image of secularization",[18] since it understands social involvement within the secular sphere of society as essentially religious.

Chinese Buddhist reformers of the early twentieth century promoted an approach to their tradition that deemphasizes (but by no means completely negates) otherworldly elements in favour of a more world-affirming version of their religion. By calling it *renjian* Buddhism, they emphasized that it was in the human realm, rather than the realms of gods and spirits, that the Buddha achieved his enlightenment and turned the wheel of Dharma. *Renjian* Buddhism ought therefore to be more affirmative of worldly matters and contribute to society.[19] One of the key concepts that Hsing Yun's teacher Taixu developed in this context was the "pure land on earth".[20] This concept merged notions of the pure lands in the Chinese Buddhist canon – the popular western pure land of the Buddha Amitabha, but also Maitreya's abode and in the Tuṣita Heaven – with many utopian elements, including socialist, Marxist, and anarchist ones popular at the time. Deemphasizing the understanding of a pure land as a place to seek rebirth in after death, *renjian* Buddhists now taught that the actual world at hand ought to be transformed into a pure land.

For *renjian* Buddhists like Taixu and Hsing Yun, to sacralise the secular constitutes a modern, world-affirming way of practising the Dharma, but it also is a means to reclaim their religion's space in society. Fo Guang Shan's many civic engagements have to be understood in this context. For Fo Guang Shan, secular society is the space for religious practice. That applies not only to Taiwan but, through the transnational flows of Chinese post-1965 migration, has been deterritorialized and expanded to the whole globe. Thus overseas, the order's philanthropic efforts are not just directed towards the own group, be it Fo Guang Shan Buddhists or the Taiwanese or Chinese diaspora community, but instead target society as a whole.

18 Ibid.

19 S. Travagnin, "Yinshun's Recovery of Shizhu Piposha Lun 十住毗婆沙論: A Madhyamaka-based Pure Land Practice in Twentieth-Century Taiwan", *Contemporary Buddhism* 14 (2013), p. 324.

20 See Taixu 太虛, "Jianshe renjian jingtu lun 建設人間淨土論" ["Treatise on the Establishment of a Pure Land in the Human Realm"], in: Yinshun (ed.) *Taixu dashi quanshu* 太虛大師全書 [Collected Works of Master Taixu], Taipei: Shandao si fojing liutong chu, 1998, vol. 24, pp. 349–430.

Generating Global Pure Lands: The Scale of Fo Guang Shan's Global Civic Engagement

In his study of Taiwanese Buddhism, Charles Jones argues that today's *renjian* Buddhist civic engagement is not a new phenomenon. The difference between it and its early twentieth-century predecessors "is one of degree, not of kind".[21] Fo Guang Shan's modernist trajectory continues to be based on early twentieth-century *renjian* Buddhist ideas, but through the global flows of Taiwanese migration, the order has expanded its civic engagement to a global scale. The following section is not exhaustive but will give an idea of the extent of Fo Guang Shan's educational and charity involvement.

One of the main objectives of the Buddhist reformers at the beginning of the last century was to modernize Buddhism through education, which here has three meanings. It can refer to the religious and secular education of the monastic *sangha*, to religious education of the laity, and to the involvement of Buddhist actors in secular education. Fo Guang Shan has made contributions to all three fields. The first, the enhancement of the education of the monastic *sangha*, was particularly relevant for the development of modern Chinese Buddhism. Although the order does run Buddhist seminaries overseas, they are short-term programmes. The complete Buddhist monastic training takes place at the main seminary at the headquarters in Taiwan. The second meaning, to provide religious education for the laity, constitutes a way of proselytizing for Fo Guang Shan. Religious education is here to be understood in the broadest sense.[22] Fo Guang Shan provides classes for lay Buddhists covering a huge variety of topics, including Buddhist doctrine and the application of Buddhist doctrine to one's life, but also flower arrangement and tea culture, to mention just a few. In Taiwan, Fo Guang Shan founded several institutions for this goal. The Srimala Buddhist Institute, for example, is an institute that aims specifically at young women, for whom it offers domestic and international study trips. But the order is probably best known for its many media enterprises. Besides print and online media, Fo Guang Shan runs its own TV station. As early as the 1960s, Hsing Yun had appeared on public TV in Taiwan. From 1997 on, this was

21 C.B. Jones, *Buddhism in Taiwan: Religion and the State, 1660–1990*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999, p. 223.

22 The following data is based on: Foguangshan zongwu weiyuan hui 佛光山宗務委員會 [Fo Guang Shan Religious Affairs Committee], *Foguangshan kaishan sishi zhou nian jinian tekan* 佛光山開山四十週年紀念特刊 [Special Issue on the 40th Anniversary of the Establishment of Fo Guang Shan], Kaohsiung: Foguang wenhua, 2008, vol. 3, chap. 3.4.

continued at the order's own TV station, which he founded for the purpose of distributing accessible knowledge about Buddhism. Today, the internet and social media constitute an additional field of engagement for the order. In 1992, Fo Guang Shan founded a community college, which since 2005 operates under its current name "Fo Guang Shan Open University", *renjian daxue* 人間大學 (Human Realm University), with branches in every Taiwanese province. Fo Guang Shan also operates an eLearning Buddhist College that gives its adherents the opportunity for online study. In addition, Fo Guang Shan began to organize book club meetings *dushu hui* 讀書會. During the regular club meetings, Fo Guang Shan adherents read and discuss a text together. What kind of text they read depends on the proficiency in Buddhist doctrine of the particular group. Texts can range from a song or poem written by Hsing Yun to more difficult ones, such as Buddhist scriptures. The acquired knowledge is then tested on a regular basis through Buddhist studies exams. This practice is not only upheld in Taiwan, but also at some temples overseas. During my fieldwork stay at the Hsi Lai Temple in spring 2018, all Los Angeles subchapters of Fo Guang Shan's lay wing, the BLIA, gathered at the temple on a weekend before the Lunar New Year celebrations to collectively take the annual Buddhist studies exam.

Of the three fields of education Fo Guang Shan is involved in, secular education is the one that constitutes a form of civic engagement, since it is directed towards society in general. As of 2008, Fo Guang Shan ran several kindergartens and child education centres, elementary and middle schools in Taiwan. The order also operates five universities. Two are in Taiwan: the Nanhua University in Chiayi and the Fo Guang University in Yilan; and three are abroad: the University of the West in the US, Guang Ming College in Manila in the Philippines,[23] and the Nan Tien Institute in Wollongong, Australia, launched in 2011.[24]

While Fo Guang Shan's lay religious education efforts address a demographic that already self-defines as Buddhist – many of the activities promote not only Buddhism but also "traditional" Chinese culture; the activities are conducted mostly on temple grounds and can be seen as an attempt to draw people in and keep them involved – Fo Guang Shan's involvement in secular education is different. Fo Guang Shan's secular educational institutions overseas are not aimed at Buddhists, but address the general public. They represent moving out of the temple into general society. Together with the order's charity engagement,

23 The following data is based on: Foguangshan zongwu weiyuan hui 佛光山宗務委員會, *Foguangshan kaishan sishi zhou nian jinian tekan* 佛光山開山四十週年紀念特刊, vol. 3, pp. 92–111.

24 Fo Guang Shan Nan Tian Institute, "Nan Tien Institute", https://www.nantien.edu.au/about-us (accessed 11 December 2018).

these activities significantly enhance the order's visibility in its many host societies. Since 2008, Fo Guang Shan has been involved in a range of charity programmes and campaigns in Taiwan, the PRC, and worldwide.[25] In Taiwan, Fo Guang Shan organizes regular children's camps, maintains a children's home, an educational centre for elementary and middle school children, three senior citizens' homes (a fourth was still one under construction in 2008), two clinics and a mobile clinic, and a columbarium. In addition, the order runs prison visiting programmes, a drug addiction rehabilitation programme, disaster relief programmes, reconstruction programmes for earthquake victims, memorial services for the victims of natural disasters, winter relief programmes for the poor, community service programmes, a hospice, environmental protection programmes, blood donation campaigns, and various training programmes for volunteers.

Overseas, Fo Guang Shan is engaged in philanthropic work in Asia, the Americas, Africa, Oceania, and, on a smaller scale, in Europe. In the People's Republic of China, the order has provided disaster relief aid and constructed an elementary school and a clinic. It runs prison visiting programmes and charity programmes for the needy and elderly in Hong Kong. In Japan, Fo Guang Shan provided disaster relief work after the Kobe earthquake in 1995 and operates visiting programmes at senior citizens' homes. In Malaysia, the Philippines, India, and Sri Lanka it runs several charity and disaster relief programmes. To Thailand, Singapore, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Myanmar it has donated wheelchairs and other goods. It has constructed a junior high school in Myanmar and provided free medical services in Northern Thailand and Indonesia. In Indonesia it operates several charity and disaster relief programmes. Fo Guang Shan has also provided donations for Iraq. After the 2004 tsunami, a 500,000 US dollar emergency fund was created by the headquarters of the order, and a variety of local BLIA chapters worldwide have provided further donations and disaster relief and reconstruction programmes for the victims. Furthermore, Fo Guang Shan has performed several memorial services to ensure a good rebirth for the deceased and thereby alleviate the suffering of the bereaved.

In the USA the order operates a variety of programmes, including winter relief, disaster aid, medical services, bone marrow donations, computer donations, academic scholarships, charity programmes for the elderly and for homeless people, and environmental programmes such as recycling activities and community clean-ups. Fo Guang Shan even runs two columbaria: one in LA and one in Houston. In Canada, the order operates several charity programmes.

25 The data that follow derive from: Foguangshan zongwu weiyuan hui 佛光山宗務委員會, *Foguangshan kaishan sishi zhou nian jinian tekan* 佛光山開山四十週年紀念特刊, vol. 5.

In Brazil the order provides medical services and runs educational and professional training programmes for local children and youths. It has even formed a football team for children from a disadvantaged background. In Paraguay it has constructed a clinic and operates several donation and charity programmes, including the sponsoring of the construction of two pedestrian overpasses. Fo Guang Shan has donated wheelchairs to Chile and provided a winter relief programme there.

On the African continent, apart from a small branch centre in the Republic of Congo and (in the past) in Malawi, the order is mainly active in South Africa, where it runs several donation and charity programmes. Recently, Fo Guang Shan's African headquarters, the Nan Hua Temple, opened the Nan Hua Academy, which provides free of charge, professional skills-training to underprivileged communities of the Kungwini Local Municipality. The school's programmes include lessons in accounting software, word processor and other software, and Mandarin. The Nan Hua Temple sponsors a scout programme for children from disadvantaged backgrounds and operates a free performance arts boarding school for young South African women. The school will be discussed in more detail below.

In Australia and New Zealand, Fo Guang Shan operates community service and several donation and charity programmes. In Papua New Guinea, the order maintains a free of charge kindergarten and runs several donation and charity programmes. Finally, in Europe, it has donated wheelchairs in France and organizes community services such as clean-up days in London.

This list indicates that overseas Fo Guang Shan's civic engagement is linked to Taiwanese migration. Fo Guang Shan is particularly involved in areas of the world where there is a big overseas Taiwanese community, such as Southeast Asia or the United States of America. However, the list also shows that in the diaspora, Fo Guang Shan's civic engagement is also meant to benefit society as a whole. It represents a deterritorialized mode of earlier Buddhist civic engagement as developed in China. Overseas, such engagement generates an outward movement that connects the Buddhist temple space with the surrounding non-Buddhist, and non-majority Chinese society. Fo Guang Shan's transnational civic engagement thereby constitutes one of the order's main spaces of cross-cultural interaction. Often the degree of interaction with host societies is limited, since many of the order's charity endeavours consist of non-recurring contributions, such as donations. However, in other cases, such as the Nan Hua Performing Arts Group and the University of the West, interaction is much more significant. Both cases are discussed below. But before looking at these two examples, let us examine how Fo Guang Shan's overseas temples through different modes of religiosity – religious practice as civic engagement as well as "traditional" practices, such as Buddhist ritual – engage on different levels with society.

Social Engagement within and beyond the Chinese Diasporic Community

During my fieldwork at the Hsi Lai Temple in California, I participated in an event that was organized by the English-language Dharma book club. Once a year, the temple cooperates with St. John Vianney Catholic Church to provide food for some of the many homeless people in Los Angeles. According to the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) there were about 55,000 people living on the streets in 2017.[26] The Fo Guang Shan activity was attended not only by members of the English-language book club but also by members of several other BLIA subchapters. Around 5:30 p.m. about 40 people, some with a Latino background, some non-Latino whites and many Chinese Americans, gathered at the church. Led by a monastic, they brought vegetarian food and about 100 sleeping bags to hand out to the needy. The church hall was packed with tables. Most people in the room were European Americans, Hispanic Americans, and African Americans. Some people were already in an adjacent room, where camp beds were provided for people to spend the night. Others were at the back of the building taking advantage of one of the mobile showers installed for the occasion. However, most sat around the round tables of the church hall and waited for their food. Volunteers in a small kitchen heated up the vegetarian food that had been prepared at the temple beforehand. Before the dinner began, the Catholic priest and a Fo Guang Shan nun welcomed the guests. Temple volunteers who acted as waiters then served the food. The scene exemplifies how Fo Guang Shan's civic engagement continues to be rooted in early twentieth-century *renjian* Buddhist religiosity. Providing food for the homeless is a way of contributing to society in general, but by taking place in a non-majority Chinese country, it adds some complexity in terms of cross-cultural dynamics. While the Fo Guang Shan volunteers are a mixed group, the majority are still ethnic Taiwanese. Yet not one of the recipients appears to have a Chinese background.

Chinese Buddhist civil engagement was informed by Western ideas and practices conveyed by Euro-American Protestant missionaries; yet in Chinese diasporic communities today, it is the Buddhists who are more involved in philanthropy. Chinese Christians in the diaspora tend to limit their charitable engagement to their own group. Comparing a Taiwanese Protestant Church with a Buddhist temple in Southern California, Carolyn Chen concludes that while the

26 USC Neighborhood Data for Social Change, "Homeless people L.A.", https://usc.data.socrata.com/stories/s/Homelessness-in-2018-A-Snapshot-of-Los-Angeles-Cou/g8ge-um6u/ (accessed 11 November 2018).

church limits it outreach to the ethnic community and mainly focuses on proselytization, the temple is heavily involved in charity work and has extended its public mission beyond the ethnic Chinese community.[27] Many Chinese Christian churches focus on providing services for the diaspora community and assisting immigrants in adapting to their new lives.[28] Yang Fenggang makes similar observations about Chinese American Christianity. He traces to church members' evangelical faith and their Confucian cultural heritage the reluctance of Chinese American Christians to get involved in society as a whole through political participation or social service.[29] Interestingly, several of the Fo Guang Shan adherents with whom I had informal conversations referred to Confucianism in order to *legitimize* their religion's high degree of involvement in society. Similarly, Yang Huinan argues that *renjian* Buddhist social engagement is not so much rooted in a revaluation of Indian Mahayana sutras, as some reformers argue, but is linked to Confucian practice and discourse.[30]

But the fact that Fo Guang Shan overseas temples reach out to mainstream society does not mean that they contribute nothing to the local Chinese community. As mentioned above, the Hsi Lai Temple also operates a columbarium in the area and provides chanting services for the deceased.

On a Sunday in spring 2018, a group of ten volunteers and two female monastics picked me up from a side entrance of the Hsi Lai temple's main shrine. We drove to a big cemetery that is located not far from the temple. The monastics and lay volunteers were on a mission to conduct a funeral service, which consisted of a solemn ritual and chanting assistance for the family of the deceased. A particularly important element of the ritual is to chant the name of the Buddha Amitabha in order to assure rebirth of the deceased in the western pure land of *Sukhāvatī*. The Buddhist chapel was decorated with lavish flower arrangements, and the atmosphere was calm and dignified. The funeral congregation was quite small and consisted mainly of the family of the deceased and the Fo Guang Shan volunteers. The deceased was not a member of BLIA, and

27 C. Chen, "The Religious Varieties of Ethnic Presence: A Comparison between a Taiwanese Immigrant Buddhist Temple and an Evangelical Christian Church", *Sociology of Religion* 63 (2002), p. 215.

28 K.J. Guest, *God in Chinatown: Religion and Survival in New York's Evolving Immigrant Community*, New York: New York University Press, 2003, pp. 195–196.

29 F. Yang, *Chinese Christians in America: Conversion, Assimilation, and Adhesive Identities*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999, p. 191.

30 Yang H. 楊惠南, "Renjian fojiao de jingdian quanshi: shi yuan ru ru fo huo shi huigui yindu?「間佛教」的經典詮釋是「援儒　佛」或是回歸印度？" ["The Doctrinal Interpretation of the Buddhist Scripture by Humanistic Buddhists: Confucianising Buddhism or Return to India"], *Chung-Hwa Buddhist Journal* 13 (2000), p. 479.

normally the temple is not able to provide this service to non-members, because there are too many people in the LA area and the BLIA lacks the manpower to provide the service for everybody. However, providing a Buddhist funeral is not only a service for the diasporic community, but also represents a possibility to spread the Dharma. During my fieldwork at the Nan Hua Temple in Bronkhorstspruit, South Africa, I interviewed a leading BLIA Johannesburg member, a very elegant, elderly Taiwanese lady, who told me that she had only joined BLIA after the Nan Hua Temple offered chanting assistance for her deceased parent. Before that she had not even identified herself as Buddhist. The generous offer and solemn ritual conducted by the temple had moved her so much that she began to get involved with the Nan Hua Temple. Despite their socially engaged outlook, Fo Guang Shan Buddhists do in fact also practise Buddhist ritual. Yet the rituals, like Fo Guang Shan Buddhist lay education, address people who are either Chinese Buddhists themselves or linked to Chinese Buddhism culturally.

Early Buddhist modernizers such as Hsing Yun's teacher Taxu were quite critical of some Amitabha-related practices, and one of the aims of the early twentieth-century *renjian* Buddhists was to correct the overly commercialist ritual practices of the past. Yet the critique was primarily directed against the common practice of some monastics who provided on-call ritual services for the deceased for cash. That they were critical of some aberrations does not mean that *renjian* Buddhists completely abandoned rituals for the deceased, including the often criticized Amitabha-related pure land practices. Death represents an elemental event in every person's life, not just for the individual, since we all die, but also for the family of the deceased. The ritual described above aims to ensure a good rebirth for the deceased, but also represents an opportunity to console the bereaved by teaching them the Buddhist Dharma. In Taiwan, other *renjian* Buddhist groups also carry out this practice.[31] At Fo Guang Shan too, the benefits of rituals for the living are emphasized, and ritual is used as an occasion to teach the Buddhist Dharma.[32]

For a Buddhist organization to be included in Main and Lai's revised definition of Socially Engaged Buddhism, social involvement within the secular sphere of society has to be understood as essentially religious. This applies also to Fo Guang Shan *renjian* Buddhism. Although Fo Guang Shan does incorporate the whole range of more "traditional" forms of Buddhist practice, social engagement is given a special function. Contributing to society is a way of practising the

31 J. Reinke, "Innovation and Continuity in the Pure Lands: Pure Land Discourses and Practices at the Taiwanese Buddhist Order Dharma Drum Mountain", *Journal of Chinese Buddhist Studies* 30 (2017), pp. 199–200.

32 Y. Xue, "Re-Creation of Rituals in Humanistic Buddhism: A Case Study of Fo Guang Shan", *Asian Philosophy* 23 (2013), p. 359.

Bodhisattva path, but is also linked to modernist projects such as nation state building through welfare and education. Yet although civic engagement constitutes an important part of Fo Guang Shan *renjian* Buddhist religiosity, that does not happen at the expense of more conventional forms of religious cultivation. At Fo Guang Shan, the religious and the secular do not represent clearly separated entities, but permeate each other.

Within the transnational framework of the diaspora, the order's civic engagement focuses not only on one's own community – be it the Chinese or Taiwanese diaspora community or other Fo Guang Shan Buddhists – but goes beyond these communities and contributes to the whole of society. At the same time, more traditional religious services, like Dharma assemblies and other rituals, maintain their importance within the Fo Guang Shan community, a community that primarily consists of first-generation migrants from Taiwan, Hong Kong, Southeast Asia, and the PRC. On a global scale, Fo Guang Shan's civic engagement therefore generates one of the order's main spaces of cross-cultural interaction. This leads us to discuss two examples in more detail: the Nan Hua Performing Arts Group in South Africa and the University of the West in the USA.

Spaces of Cross-Cultural Interaction: The Nan Hua Performing Arts Group

The line between charity and education is not always clear-cut: As we have seen above (e.g. with regard to the construction of schools and providing of scholarships), the two forms of civic engagement often overlap. The Nan Hua Performing Arts Group or *tian long dui* 天龍隊 (heavenly dragon group)[33] is an interesting example, since it shows that Fo Guang Shan's social engagement constitutes an often overlooked space of cross-cultural interaction between Fo Guang Shan monastics, Taiwanese migrants, and mainstream society.

The group was founded in 2013, and student enrolment began in 2014. When I interviewed one of the monastics at the Nan Hua Temple, he told me that only a single-digit percentage of the black, female population of South Africa has a university degree. After finishing high school, many young women get married, have children, and do not continue their education. The temple therefore established the Nan Hua Performing Arts Group in order to provide

33 This section is based on data collected during my fieldwork at the Nan Hua Temple in late 2017.

learning opportunities for young women who live in underdeveloped and rural areas. The group represents one of the temple's most successful efforts to contribute to South African society. In March 2018, it was even invited to participate in the conference of the UN Women's Commission on the Status of Women held in New York.

The Nan Hua Performance Art Group has a three-year course programme. It is free of charge, includes free board and lodging, and covers travelling expenses for performance tours. Students who have proven themselves to be responsible and diligent enough have the option to continue for two more years, during which they can serve as teaching assistants. In December 2017, the first round of students received their degrees. They decided to stay at the temple to work as teaching assistants. They also help out with the scout programme the temple has initiated in order to provide recreational activities for under-privileged children from neighbouring townships.

The classes designed for the young women include computer courses and Mandarin language classes, but the main focus is on performance arts. Traditional Chinese and African drumming, traditional African dancing, African marimba xylophone playing, modern dance, Chinese martial arts, and traditional dances, are all part of the curriculum. The classes are taught by local South African as well as Taiwanese teachers. First-year students begin with the study of African performance arts taught by the local teachers, while from the second year on, they are also taught by Taiwanese teachers flown in from Taipei, who stay for about four weeks at a time and teach intensive classes in Chinese drum, dance, and performance.

The students who participate in the programme come from different South African ethnic groups and different parts of the country. New students often come from the same groups as current ones, because they have heard of the programme from these students. However, Fo Guang Shan also advertises the programme in local newspapers. A prerequisite for enrolment is that students have to be female, 18 to 25 years old, and unmarried. An interview is conducted at the temple to see if they fit into the programme. So far, 131 young black South African women have been enrolled in the programme. However, many did not persevere. The current 30 were selected from a group of 200. Reasons for giving up include the fact that some women cannot adjust to the vegetarian food or the strict temple life, while others may have had difficulties with the classes. Or they just do not pass the exams that are held regularly.

The overall quality of the young performers, particularly of the students of the higher classes, is impressive. The temple was even approached by a TV station and asked to participate in the popular TV show "South Africa's Got Talent". The young women of the second and third year of the Nan Hua Performing Arts

Group participated and even made it to the semi-finals. The group also performs regularly at different venues in Gauteng Province, often at events organized by the local Taiwanese and Chinese communities. Once a year the second- and third-year students go on an Asia tour and perform in different Fo Guang Shan temples. They have travelled to Taiwan, the PRC, Malaysia, and the Philippines. One monastic told me that the audiences in Asia, mostly consisting of ethnic Chinese, are very touched to see young African women perform traditional Chinese arts at such a high professional level. The temple plans to further professionalize the training by expanding its cooperation with other Chinese and Taiwanese groups.

The young women live on the temple grounds and are fully integrated in the daily life of the temple. They eat together with the monastics, the long-time volunteers, and the staff. Although the temple does hope to convey Fo Guang Shan Buddhist values to the students, they are not required to become Buddhists or participate in the daily morning service that is conducted in one of the shrine halls. In fact, none of the students is a Buddhist; one student is Muslim and all others are Christians. I had the opportunity to teach two classes to the students: one class for the whole student body on Chinese language learning and another specifically for first-year students focusing on Taiwanese culture and *renjian* Buddhism. On the second occasion the students discussed their impressions of the temple and of Buddhism, but also opened up about their life in the programme. The students reported how the Chinese Buddhist iconography at the temple – in particular the statue of the Thousand-Hand Avalokiteśvara (*qianshou Guanyin* 千手觀音) – had irritated them in the beginning, but over time they had got used to it. They were very impressed by the disciplined way the volunteers at the temple practise Buddhism. While they also managed to adjust to the vegetarian cuisine, several mentioned that the temple is very quiet and has many rules. Finally, everybody agreed with the following statement: "Every culture is different. But that children have to respect their parents is a notion common to Chinese and black South African culture." There are of course significant differences between Taiwanese culture and the cultures of the local black communities, including the food and the way people talk and socialize. The difference might become even bigger because a temple is not any kind of Taiwanese space but a religious space with many rules and regulations. A Buddhist temple is a space for Buddhist practice *xiuxing* 修行, while the students of the Nan Hua Performance Group are young women at an age when people tend to be more interested in having fun or, going to the movies than living the quiet life of a temple. Therefore, some students leave the programme after a while, but others stay. Those who stay have adjusted to the strict environment. The young women in the Nan Hua Performing Arts Group

are part of the temple life. They share the same environment, eating and living together. Although the temple sets the rules, it has also to some degree adapts to the situation. Compared to other Fo Guang Shan overseas temples, the atmosphere at Nan Hua is much livelier and many rules are not enforced as strictly. The Nan Hua Temple hopes to spread *renjian* Buddhism to the local non-Chinese South African population, but the young women of the Nan Hua Performance Arts Group, like the vast majority of non-Chinese recipients of Fo Guang Shan educational and charity engagements worldwide, do not become Buddhists. Compared to the strong missionary zeal of overseas Chinese Christians, Fo Guang Shan takes a soft approach to proselytization. However, through its local performances and the television appearances the group functions as what one BLIA member has called "cultural ambassadors" for the temple in South Africa. Furthermore, by touring other Fo Guang Shan temples in Taiwan and Southeast Asia and by appearing in the Fo Guang Shan media, the Nan Hua Performance groups represent a successful example of Fo Guang Shan's transnational civic engagements and thereby attract donations and revenue.

Tertiary Education in the Ethnoburb: The University of the West

Of the three Fo Guang Shan's higher institutes of education that are located outside of Taiwan, the University of the West was established first. Its campus is located in Rosemead in the Los Angeles San Gabriel Valley. The valley consists of a group of Chinese suburban neighbourhoods, where the influx of a large number of Chinese in a relatively short period of time has generated large Chinese residential and business suburban clusters. The US ethnographer Wei Li has dubbed the area a Chinese "ethnoburb", in order to differentiate it from earlier modes of Chinese settlement, such as the Chinatown.[34] The campus is only a 20-minute drive away from the Hsi Lai Temple. In the beginning, the university was located on temple grounds, but in 1991 it was officially separated.[35] After the construction of Hsi Lai Temple was completed, Hsing Yun began to consider founding a liberal arts university in the US. He stated: "At the time I had a thought, Americans had founded

34 W. Li, *Ethnoburb: The New Ethnic Community in Urban America*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2011, p. 1.

35 If not further referenced, the following information is retrieved from T. Storch, *Buddhist-Based Universities in the United States: Searching for a New Model in Higher Education*, London: Lexington Books, 2015, pp. 11–20.

many Christian universities in China, looking at the issue from a perspective of cultural exchange, and we should repay the United States and build a University in the US as gift to express our gratitude."[36]

The University of the West was originally called Hsi Lai University. Its current name, University of the West, was adopted in April 2004. Currently, the university is organized under the Non-profit Public Benefit Corporation Law. The university defines itself as a private, non-profit, non-sectarian, co-educational institution. In 2006, the University of the West was accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC). It provides four undergraduate programmes[37]– Business Administration, English, Liberal Arts, and Psychology – and four graduate programmes: Buddhist Chaplaincy, Business Administration, Psychology, and Religious Studies. The certificate programmes include: Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), Undergraduate Certificate in Business Administration, Graduate Certificate in Business Administration, and a Post-MBA Certificate in Business Administration.

The University of the West is a secular university, and faculty is not required to be Buddhist.[38] However, the values and the mission of the school are defined in Buddhist terms.[39] Some classes cover the books of Fo Guang Shan's founder Hsing Yun, and sometimes a monastic gives classes on certain Buddhism-related topics, e.g. on *renjian* Buddhism and management. The business programme has a learning through service component, and all the students enrolled in undergraduate programmes are required to take at least one religious studies course. The courses focus more on general life education than on the academic study of religion. The university has the lowest tuition fees for a private university in the state of California and in addition provides many scholarships for its students.[40]

36 "那時候我有一個想法，我認為美國人在中國興辦了很多教會大學，站在文化交流的立場，我們也可以回饋美國，在美國辦一所大學以示酬謝", in: Hsing Yun 星雲, *Bai nian foyuan* 百年佛緣 [100 Years of Karmic Connections], Kaohsiung: Foguang chubanshe, 2013, vol. 5, pp. 142–143.

37 Fo Guang Shan University of the West, "Academics | University of the West", http://www.uwest.edu/academics/ (accessed 12 November 2018).

38 If not marked differently, the following section is based on data collected during my fieldwork at the Hsi Lai Temple in the spring of 2018.

39 "Our Mission. The mission of University of the West is to provide a whole-person education in a context informed by Buddhist wisdom and values, and to facilitate cultural understanding and appreciation between East and West". Fo Guang Shan University of the West, "Mission | University of the West", https://www.uwest.edu/about-uwest/our-mission/ (accessed 12 November 2018).

40 President's Scholarship, Dean's Scholarship, and UWest Scholarship, Lotus Scholarship, Bridge Scholarship, IBEF International Buddhist Education Foundation Scholarship for monastics.

Although the school is independent, it maintains a close connection to the temple. The presidents of the University of the West and Fo Guang Shan's Taiwanese universities meet regularly, and the school also maintains a close relationship with the educational institutes in the Philippines and Australia. The temple provides most of the university's financial support. There are opportunities for internships and volunteer work, but also meditation retreats at the temple. Some students have found jobs in the temple after graduation.

The University of the West has a very diverse student body. About half of the students are international students. The ratio is about even in all four main tracks, with psychology attracting more domestic students. The MBA programme attracts many international students, while the religious studies and Buddhist chaplaincy students are of mixed backgrounds. The business administration programme is the biggest programme. The school aims to have a half-and-half balance of undergraduate and graduate students, but at the time of my research it had slightly more graduate students. The school has registered a rise in the number of Hispanic Americans in the undergraduate programmes, which reflects demographic developments in the San Gabriel Valley. There are more Asian exchange students than Asian American ones, but the school plans to change this. It also aims to attract more second-generation Euro American Buddhists, or "Dharma brats". Most of the overseas students are from Asia, particularly from Chinese-speaking countries, above all Taiwan and the PRC. While the school under its old name developed a reputation in Asian Buddhist monastic circles, and the religious studies and chaplaincy departments continue to attract elite Buddhist monastics from Asia, the name change has proven successful in attracting more students in general. For local students the pronunciation of the school name has become easier, and international students prefer to receive a diploma from a university with an English, non-Chinese name.

Compared to the Nan Hua Performing Arts Group, the University of the West is more independent from the temple. This is the case not only because of the physical distance between the temple and the school, but also because the university has to adhere to the regulations related to its WASC accreditation. However, while the majority of its students do not have extensive interaction with the temple, some do. In addition, the university is quite well known in Asia, and has a good reputation in Buddhist circles in other Asian countries besides Taiwan. Some of the university's students include elite monastics from the People's Republic of China and Thailand. Thus, the university constitutes an example of contemporary Buddhist transnationalism.

Conclusion

From its beginnings, transnational encounters have shaped the development of modernist, *renjian* Buddhism in China. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, amalgamations of native and foreign elements generated new forms of Chinese religiosity that were often linked to the modern nation state project. Buddhists reacted to the threat of being pushed out of the newly emerging secular sphere by revaluating the space of society as a field for religious cultivation, thereby merging the secular and the religious. To this day, engagement in the secular sphere of society continues to be the main characteristic of contemporary *renjian* Buddhists, including Fo Guang Shan. Certain aspects of Protestant Christian involvement in China, such as building modern schools and contributing to charity, have created models for *renjian* Buddhists to emulate. During the second half of the last century *renjian* Buddhists deterritorialized the religiously motivated civic engagement that emerged in the context of the Chinese nation state building project. Facilitated by the transnational flows of post-1965 Chinese migration, they expanded their civic engagement across the globe.

While many contemporary Chinese Christians within the diaspora focus on proselytization and are even sceptical of philanthropic work, Fo Guang Shan has deterritorialized and thereby globalized its civic engagement. In comparison to many Chinese Christian groups overseas, Fo Guang Shan applies a softer approach to proselytization. Instead of primarily trying to spread the Dharma within the diasporic community, Fo Guang Shan's overseas temples aim to improve the living conditions of the population of their host society, the ultimate goal being to establish a global "pure land on earth". But that is a long-term goal. By applying the spirit of its specific tradition – *renjian* Buddhism – Fo Guang Shan's immediate focus is on contributing to society. To invest in charity and education is a form of religious practice but also means localizing oneself within the mainstream culture of the host society. The order aims to convey the values of *renjian* Buddhism and thereby develop local Buddhist talent, assuming that this will pay off in the long run.

Through civic engagement, Fo Guang Shan's overseas temples generate many linkages with their respective host societies. Most of Fo Guang Shan's charity and educational activities are not intended for the actors' own group, be it the Taiwanese or Chinese diaspora community or the community of the Fo Guang Shan Buddhists, but are meant to benefit society as a whole. Although many of the contacts between Fo Guang Shan adherents and their beneficiaries are only brief, they help to introduce the order to mainstream culture. Others, as in the case of the Nan Hua Performing Arts Group, are more sustained. Furthermore, Fo Guang Shan's engagement overseas is producing effects back in

Taiwan and is also noticed in other Buddhist Asian circles. This helps Fo Guang Shan to attract donations, and many Fo Guang Shan adherents take pride in the global contributions of their order. Fo Guang Shan Buddhist civic engagement represents only one aspect of the order's social engagement, alongside the modernization of Chinese Buddhist ritual and religious practice and the deployment of notions of Chinese culture. Together these form a particular mode of modern Chinese Buddhist religiosity. Fo Guang Shan Buddhists are modernist *bodhisattvas* who aim to contribute to society and thereby generate a global pure land.