

Mapping Modern Mahayana

The Fo Guang Ancestral Da Jue Temple (*Foguang zuting dajue si* 佛光祖庭大覺寺) is located just outside of the city of Yixing (義興), southern Jiangsu (江蘇) Province, in the People's Republic of China (PRC). The newly reconstructed temple complex is a half-hour drive away from the city, which is primarily known for its traditional Yixing clay teapots. Nestled in the bamboo forested hillside at the rear of the temple complex stands a 108-metre tall structure, the Fragrant Forest Abundant Treasure White Pagoda (*Xianglin duobao baita* 香林多寶白塔). At night, the ivory-coloured pagoda with its dark yellow tiered eaves is aglitter with so many lights that it looks almost as if the building were made of pure gold and silver (see Figure 1).



Figure 1: Fragrant Forest Abundant Treasure White Pagoda, Da Jue Temple, PRC.

It is the last evening of my field stay at the temple. I am participating in a small gathering held in a medium-sized assembly hall on the first floor of the pagoda. There are about 50 people in the room. At its centre sits Venerable Hsing Yun (*Xingyun* 星雲), or Grand Master (*dashi* 大師), as he is respectfully known to his followers.¹ Hsing Yun is the founder of the modernist Taiwanese Buddhist order, Fo Guang Shan (佛光山, English: Buddha's Light Mountain). The monk, who is already in his nineties, is attended by some very senior Fo Guang Shan monastics from Taiwan (Republic of China, ROC). Around them sit a small group of distinguished guests as well as the Chinese female monastics and volunteers living at the temple. The guests include such notable visitors as the head of the Jiangsu province State Bureau of Religious Affairs, a high-ranking mainland Chinese monk, and a famous Taiwanese Pop singer. The evening serves as a small farewell function for Hsing Yun, who is about to return to Taiwan after having spent some time at his ancestral temple. The ethnographic extract above describes the only occasion during my research that I had the chance to meet Fo Guang Shan's founder in person. In fact, it was pure good fortune that I happened to be at Da Jue Temple at the same time as Hsing Yun. Before moving into the temple for a week, I had already spent a month in Yixing and paid regular visits to Da Jue. And while Hsing Yun was about to return to Taiwan on the next day, I would go on to visit the order's other facilities in the People's Republic of China.

Hsing Yun was born in China in 1927. In 1949, like many other Buddhist monastics who feared the anti-religious politics of the CCP, he followed the KMT troops on their retreat to Taiwan. In the immediate post-war years, Taiwan was not an easy place for Buddhist monastics from China. However, after enduring years of hardship, Hsing Yun established a following and moved to the south of the island, where he founded Fo Guang Shan in 1967. Only a decade later, Hsing Yun made his first attempts to develop the order beyond the shores of the small island. The second half of the twentieth century had brought significant global change and restructuring. Political, economic, and societal transformations in Asia as well as changing migration policies in Western countries facilitated the emergence of new globalized spatial orders that interlinked the countries of Asia with the rest of the world in multiple new ways. In the course of this reordering, a new generation of affluent and highly educated ethnic

¹ "Venerable" is the common English translation for *fashi* 法師 (literal meaning: Dharma teacher), the Chinese title of respect for Buddhist monastics. "Grand Master" is the English translation for *dashi* most commonly used at Fo Guang Shan. Another common translation is "Venerable Master". However, for the sake of readability, I will refer to Buddhist monastics solely by their Dharma name (e.g., Hsing Yun instead of Venerable, or Grand Master Hsing Yun).

Chinese transnational migrants left their home countries and settled all over the world. Hsing Yun utilized these emerging conditions and developed his temple located in what was then considered Taiwan's hinterlands into today's Fo Guang Shan's global network. Da Jue Temple and the order's other facilities in the People's Republic of China represent the most recent addition to the order's globalization project. By bringing *renjian* Buddhism back to its birthplace, Hsing Yun completes the circle of the order's transnational development.

Fo Guang Shan is the leading contemporary order in the modernist reformation movement of the Chinese Mahayana tradition (*hanchuan fojiao* 漢傳佛教) that has taken place over the past century. The order's socially-engaged approach to the Buddhist tradition is called *renjian* Buddhism (*renjian fojiao* 人間佛教), or, in English, Buddhism of the human realm.² Having emerged in response to the process of building China as a modern nation-state, the development of this modern Buddhist religiosity represents a successful attempt to secure a space for the Buddhist tradition within modernizing Chinese societies. According to Buddhist doctrine, our world is subdivided into six realms: the realm of the gods, *asuras* (or half-gods), humans, animals, hungry ghosts, and the hells. For *renjian* Buddhists such as Hsing Yun, the Chinese Mahayana of the past had been overly preoccupied with ghosts and death. By shifting the emphasis to the human realm, he and other Buddhist modernizers instead stress that it is the world of the living – and thus society – that constitutes the central space for Buddhist practice. Fo Guang Shan, besides its religious undertakings, is known for its countless cultural, educational, and charity engagements in secular society. Together these engagements form the core of the order's modernist Buddhist religiosity. I use the term religiosity when speaking of a non-Western tradition such as Buddhism not because I am unaware of the Eurocentric connotations of the term religion, but because *renjian* Buddhism has emerged in reference to the globalization of the Western idea of religion that took place during the era of colonialism. Furthermore, the term religiosity is helpful because it stresses that there are many ways to practice, live, and think about one particular tradition. Fo Guang Shan's approach to *renjian* Buddhism represents one of multiple Chinese and non-Chinese modern Buddhist religiosities, one that has developed in a particular local context – Republican Era China and post-war Taiwan – but that has in its further course expanded into significant parts of the globe. The aim of this book is to explore the conditions and dynamics that have facilitated the order's global development and the way they continue to

² *Renjian fojiao* 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.

shape its trajectory to this day. In other words, it is an attempt to map the globalization of the modern Chinese Mahayana.

The initial question of this book is very simple: Why has Fo Guang Shan's globalization project been so successful? Fo Guang Shan is not the only order in the Chinese Mahayana tradition that has attempted to develop transnationally. There are other orders, such as Dharma Drum Mountain (*Fagu shan* 法鼓山) and Chung Tai Shan (*Zhongtai shan* 中台山) from Taiwan, and most recently, Long Quan Temple (*Longquan si* 龍泉寺) from the People's Republic, that are also developing a global presence. In addition, there are many smaller temples and temple networks that are attempting to achieve this goal. Of these, however, Fo Guang Shan is inarguably the most successful so far. The order maintains around 200 temples and practice centres in addition to a range of affiliated facilities worldwide.³ The only other organization whose globalization project has met with comparable success is the Taiwanese Buddhist charity Tzu Chi (*Ciji gongde hui* 慈濟功德會). Despite being founded by a Buddhist nun, Tzu Chi is not a Buddhist order in the conventional sense, but a registered charity. Thus, Fo Guang Shan, with its worldwide net of temples, is definitely the most visible representative of Chinese Mahayana Buddhism on the global stage.

I call Fo Guang Shan's transnational development a globalization project not only because *renjian* Buddhists who had in the past primarily stayed within China's borders are now actively taking part in and taking advantage of a world that is increasingly integrated on a global scale, but also to emphasize that globalization is a dynamic meta-order that is generated through the border-crossing activities of multiple actors at a myriad of locations. Globalization, as I understand it, is not a single monolithic enterprise undertaken by Western states or faceless neoliberal multinational companies who aim to standardize the world after a Western image, but instead a highly complex and multifaceted process that is generated by a multitude of actors from all over the world. Fo Guang Shan and its globalization project represents one such actor, one that originates from Taiwan and that aims at globalizing its modern Buddhist religiosity. In pursuing this objective, the order is not merely taking advantage of a globalized world, but through its countless Buddhist social engagements all over the globe, is simultaneously involved in the very production of the world's global condition.

This book is by no means the first study on Fo Guang Shan. In addition to a seminal monograph on the order by religious studies scholar Stuart Chandler, a significant body of research exists in Chinese, English, and several other

3 Shi Yongdong 釋永東, *Renjian fojiao shijie zhanwang* 人間佛教世界展望, Taipei: Lantai 蘭臺, 2016, p. 6.

languages.⁴ This book builds on existing research, while shifting focus to the transnational border-crossings and linkages that facilitated the emergence of *renjian* Buddhism and continue to shape the order's global development to this day. It is situated at the crossroads of three academic discussions: First, by placing Fo Guang Shan's global trajectory in the context of transnationalism and ethnic Chinese migration, this book provides a fresh angle to the study of Chinese religions. Second, by examining how one particular modern Buddhist religiosity that developed in a specific place moves into a global context, it contributes to ongoing debates of what constitutes modern and contemporary Buddhism. Finally, as a multi-sited field study on a religious globalization project that has originated from Taiwan, this book explores the social, cultural, and religious fabrics that underlie the spatial configurations of globalization. The book is structured into three parts: To provide a broader context, the second chapter of this book first “zooms

4 S. Chandler, *Establishing a Pure Land on Earth: The Foguang Buddhist Perspective on Modernization and Globalization*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004; R. Madsen, *Democracy's Dharma: Religious Renaissance and Political Development in Taiwan*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007; C.-T. Kuo, *Religion and Democracy in Taiwan*, Albany: SUNY Press, 2008, pp. 21–25; A. Laliberté, *The Politics of Buddhist Organizations in Taiwan, 1989–2003: Safeguarding the Faith, Building a Pure Land, Helping the Poor*, London: Routledge, 2014, pp. 66–85; Shi Yongdong, *Renjian fojiao shijie zhanwang*; Lu K. 陸鏗 and Ma X. 馬西屏, “Xingyun dashi yu renjian fojiao quanqiu hua fazhan zhi yanjiu” 星雲大師與人間佛教全球化發展之研究, *Pumen xuebao* 普門學報 40 (2007), pp. 1–30; Shi Manju 釋滿具, “Renjian fojiao quanqiu honghua wenti luelun – yi Meiguo weili” 人間佛教全球弘化問題略論 – 以美國為例, in: Cheng G. 程恭讓 and Shi Miaofan 釋妙凡 (eds.), *2013 Xingyun dashi renjian fojiao – lilun shijian yanjiu (xia)* 2013 星雲大師人間佛教理論實踐研究(下), Kaohsiung: Foguang wenhua 佛光文化, 2013, pp. 482–498; Shi Miaoyi 釋妙益, “Cong Xingyun dashi bentuhua linian kan Foguang quanqiu hongfa zhi wenhua shiying ji chengxiao – yi Helan Hehua Si weili” 從星雲大師本土化理念看佛光全球弘法之文化適應及成效 – 以荷蘭荷華寺為例, in: Cheng and Shi Miaofan (eds.), *2013 Xingyun dashi renjian fojiao – lilun shijian yanjiu (xia)*, pp. 500–539; Shi Miaoyi 釋妙益, “Cong ‘Bolin Foguangshan dewan zu’ kan Deguo hongfa chengxiao ji fojiao bentuhua” 從「柏林佛光山德文組」看德國弘法成效及佛教本土化, in: Cheng and Shi Miaofan (eds.), *Renjian fojiao gaofeng luntan – renjian fojiao zongyao* 人間佛教高峰論壇 – 人間佛教宗要, Kaohsiung: Foguang wenhua, 2014, pp. 640–666; D. Wong and P. Levitt, “Travelling Faiths and Migrant Religions: The Case of Circulating Models of Da'wa among the Tablighi Jamaat and Foguangshan in Malaysia”, *Global Networks* 14 (2014) 3, pp. 348–362; J. M.-T. Chia, “Toward a Modern Buddhist Hagiography: Telling the Life of Hsing Yun in Popular Media”, *Asian Ethnology* 74 (2015) 1, pp. 141–165; X. Yu, “Re-Creation of Rituals in Humanistic Buddhism: A Case Study of Fo Guang Shan”, *Asian Philosophy* 23 (2013) 4, pp. 350–364; J. Yu, “Promoting Buddhism through Modern Sports: The Case Study of Fo Guang Shan in Taiwan”, *Physical Culture and Sport: Studies and Research* 53 (2011) 1, pp. 28–38; Shi Miaoguang, “Issues of Acculturation and Globalization Faced by the Fo Guang Shan Buddhist Order”, in: Cheng and Shi Miaofan (eds.), *2013 Xingyun dashi renjian fojiao – lilun shijian yanjiu (xia)*, pp. 541–576.

out” providing an overview of the history of *renjian* Buddhism, a history characterized by countless border-crossings and transnational entanglements. The chapter discusses the specific conditions, dynamics, and transnational linkages that shaped the emergence of a modernist Buddhist religiosity during China’s Republican Era. It then goes on to explore the changes that took place in the second half of the last century that resulted in the establishment of *renjian* Buddhism in Taiwan. The chapter concludes with an overview of the order’s globalization project. In the following four ethnographic chapters, I will turn to some key issues of this project in greater detail. To do so I will “zoom in” to a selection of temple spaces and facilities in the US, South Africa, and the PRC. Chapter three discusses the people involved in Fo Guang Shan’s globalization project. Of whom are we speaking when we say Fo Guang Shan’s global trajectory is linked to a new generation of ethnic Chinese migrants? The global ethnic Chinese diaspora is far from being a homogenous entity. To what degree do issues such as social class, language and dialect, national and regional origin, and intergenerational dynamics shape the order’s transnational development? Who, besides first generation ethnic Chinese migrants, is involved in the order’s globalization project, how are they involved, and why? The following three chapters deal with the content of Fo Guang Shan’s globalization project. This relates to the order’s socially-engaged Buddhist practices in the fields of culture, charity, education, and religious cultivation. How do these practices and discourses play out in a diasporic setting? What is different in the PRC? Do the same kind of engagements have the same function irrespective of location? In what way do Buddhist social engagements link the temple back to the core Asian nations of the global sinosphere? How do they link a particular temple to its new host society? What kind of engagements connect what kind of people? Finally, in the concluding chapter I will further explore some issues that relate to the spatial dimension of Fo Guang Shan’s globalization project. What does the globalization project of a religious actor from the periphery of the sinosphere such as Fo Guang Shan tell us about the very fabric and spatiality of globalization? Furthermore, by examining how the order’s modernist approach to the Buddhist tradition that was developed in a particular time and place, Republican Era China and post-war Taiwan, plays out in a global setting, what conclusions can we draw regarding the relationship between modern Buddhism and the conditions of globalization? I will discuss how exploring the order’s transnational development points to the way globalization as a spatial configuration is comprised of various secondary spatial orders, each of which is associated with their own ideas of what constitutes a modern Buddhist religiosity. How does Fo Guang Shan negotiate potential tensions between differing ideas on how to practice modern Buddhism? The book closes with a brief discussion of some of the key issues that may impact the order’s global development in the future.

Following Fo Guang Shan

How does one undertake an ethnographic study of a phenomenon that is taking place not just within the confines of a clearly demarcated space but instead in different parts of the globe? Traditionally, ethnographic researchers often focus on a bounded space where they spend an extended period of time conducting in-depth research.⁵ While this time-tested approach has produced many valuable insights, it is not necessarily well-suited to the study of mobile phenomena. If, for example, research on Fo Guang Shan transnationalism were conducted exclusively at the Order's headquarters in Kaohsiung (Gaoxiong 高雄), one would risk overemphasizing the role of the centre. Instead of detecting how the dynamics and forces that drive Fo Guang Shan's global spread play out "on the ground", the researcher would learn more about the conscious intentions of the centre with respect to its global development. This approach would tend to portray the centre as the sole creator of the order's transnational spread. At the same time, if instead one were to pick a single overseas facility as a field site, while one would indeed get a better understanding of the situation on the ground, one would also risk generalizing whatever can be found at that particular place and projecting it on Fo Guang Shan's globalization project as a whole. Thus, to get a more comprehensive picture and understand the conditions and dynamics that link the different overseas temples and thereby generate Fo Guang Shan's global success, the field needs to be expanded. The researcher of mobile phenomena needs to be as mobile as the phenomena to be researched, or, as anthropologist George Marcus puts it, he or she needs to follow the movements of people, of things, and so on.⁶ In other words, in the context of this study, if we want to understand Fo Guang Shan's transnational trajectory, we need to "follow Fo Guang Shan".

Considering the sheer number of Fo Guang Shan's overseas facilities, it would be impossible to conduct research at every single one of them.⁷ In addition to the order's headquarters, I have therefore chosen a sample of the order's overseas temples and facilities for this study. During the foundational phase of my research in Taiwan, it very soon became obvious that the order's global spread is entwined with the dynamics of post-1965 ethnic Chinese migration. For example,

5 G. E. Marcus, "Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography", *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995) 1, p. 95.

6 Ibid., p. 106.

7 In fact, Hsing Yun biographer Fu Zhiying has calculated that if a researcher were to spend ten days, including travel time, at each of Fo Guang Shan's overseas temples, he or she would need more than three years to study them all. Fu Z., *Bright Star, Luminous Cloud: The Life of a Simple Monk*, Hacienda Heights, CA: Buddha's Light Publishing, 2008, p. 137.

Hsi Lai Temple (*Xilai si* 西來寺) in the US, the order's first and most important overseas temple, is not coincidentally located at the heart of one of the most flourishing overseas Chinese communities worldwide. Similarly, the dynamic demographic composition of the Buddha's Light International Association's (*Guoji fanguang hui* 國際佛光會, hereafter BLIA) membership – and temple visitors in general – is linked to the shifting internal composition of the global Chinese diaspora. While Taiwanese constituted the main group of ethnic Chinese frequenting Fo Guang Shan's overseas temples in the early days, over time there has been an increase in ethnic Chinese visitors from Southeast Asia, Hong Kong, and, most recently, the PRC. Something that has also become evident is the importance of social engagement in Fo Guang Shan transnationalism. Social engagement at Fo Guang Shan is not limited to philanthropy: it also takes place in the fields of culture, charity, education, and religious cultivation. All of the order's temples are extremely busy and organise a plethora of activities. In fact, during my fieldwork at Hsi Lai Temple, it was impossible for me to participate in all the temple's activities because the schedule was often so full that two, three, or even more events took place at the same time. As the centre of Fo Guang Shan's globalization project, Hsi Lai Temple was thus a natural candidate for this study. In order to get a more balanced picture, I also selected a temple located in a less affluent area, Nan Hua Temple (南華寺) in South Africa. Finally, the most recent development of Fo Guang Shan's globalization project – the shift towards the PRC – could not be ignored. Thus, the field site sample for this study consists of three Fo Guang Shan overseas temples that are located in three very distinct regions: Hsi Lai Temple in Los Angeles County, USA; Nan Hua Temple in Bronkhorstspuit, South Africa; and the recently (re)constructed Fo Guang Ancestral Da Jue Temple in Yixing, Jiangsu province, PRC.

The physical temple space lies at the heart of this ethnography because it is the starting point as well as the central arena for the order's transnationalism. Overseas temples such as Hsi Lai or Nan Hua serve a wide range of social functions: Most obviously, the temple constitutes a ritual space and provides a place for religious cultivation. Yet people also visit the temple to take part in recreational and leisure activities. In addition, it functions as a school where children as well as adults can take Chinese classes or classes on Buddhism. Some temples' dining halls are popular places for people who work or live in the neighborhood to eat a vegetarian lunch. Most temples also operate a branch of the order's Water Drop (*Dishuifang* 滴水坊) teahouse chain, where guests can enjoy a snack and cup of tea or coffee. Visitors can visit an exhibition in one of the temple galleries or take part in traditional holiday festivities. The temple is not exclusively a space for Buddhist cultivation, but also provides ample opportunities to experience Chinese culture. First-generation Chinese migrants may come to the

temple to meet fellow Buddhists and also socialize with other Chinese speakers. Or they might just shop at the temple store for the newest Dharma book, a bag of Taiwanese Oolong Tea, or some Buddhist paraphernalia. If visitors wish to become more involved, they can become members of the BLIA, attend meetings and study groups, or become volunteers. Some of Fo Guang Shan's charitable activities, or at least their coordination, take place at the temple. The temple is also where the monastics and the temple's long-term volunteers live, and where most of the interactions between the monastics and the laity take place.

Conducting multi-sited ethnography at three of the order's major overseas temples makes it possible to identify the linkages and practices of Fo Guang Shan that span geographically dispersed places. At the same time, it also makes it possible to recognize the similarities and differences between multiple localities.⁸ Examining Fo Guang Shan's transnationalism at multiple field sites thus sheds light on the importance of ethnic Chinese migration and a socially-engaged modern Buddhist religiosity for the order's global development. It also allows us to examine to what degree Fo Guang Shan's religious transnationalism plays out differently under differing local circumstances. The order's overseas temples in the US and South Africa, for example, are targeting diasporic communities while its facilities in the PRC are frequented by Buddhists belonging to mainstream Chinese society. In shifting the focus from the order's centre in Taiwan to its overseas temples and the dynamics that link these places, this book also stresses the importance of transnational dynamics over that of strategy. Thus, rather than confer agency for Fo Guang Shan's globalization project exclusively on the order's founder, despite the undeniably important role he plays, or on the order as a whole, thereby portraying it as a homogenous entity, but instead examining the issue through a spatial lens, the importance of a variety of dynamics and actors that have shaped the order's global trajectory can be more clearly seen. Fo Guang Shan is a large-scale order with about 1300 monastics and an enormous lay following. Despite the order's centralist and hierarchical structure, different Fo Guang Shan Buddhists, monastic and lay, who live in different localities, with different backgrounds and life circumstances, have different needs and views. The layers and complexities of a global ethnic Chinese diaspora – in particular with regard to factors such as socioeconomic class and national origin – and the way Fo Guang Shan's socially-engaged Buddhist religiosity resonates with it, all constitute important forces driving this particular globalization project.

8 A. Amelina and T. Faist, "De-Naturalizing the National in Research Methodologies: Key Concepts of Transnational Studies in Migration", *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 35 (2012) 10, p. 2.

Another important aspect of multi-sited ethnography as a research method is that it uses a sample of field sites in order to escape the dichotomy of a “life world” and “system” that is often invoked in single-site ethnographic studies. Within this approach, the local (the life worlds of people) is studied through ethnography while the global or the world system that surrounds them (e.g., globalization, the nation, capitalism, etc.) has to be called into play through other methods, often by referring to the work of macro theorists.⁹ Multi-sited ethnography, on the other hand, examines how the world system generates itself through the connections between multiple local field sites. Marcus notes: “Although multi-sited ethnography is an exercise in mapping terrain, its goal is not holistic representation, an ethnographic portrayal of the world system as a totality. Rather it claims that any ethnography of a cultural formation in the world system is also an ethnography of the system [. . .].”¹⁰ For our case, this means that Fo Guang Shan’s facilities, which are dispersed over significant parts of the globe, in their connectivity form a particular transnational formation; the globalization project of Fo Guang Shan. At the same time, through this very connectivity, Fo Guang Shan takes part in the makings of globalization. Tracing this connectivity through ethnographic fieldwork undertaken at multiple sites not only allows us to better understand how the order has achieved its global expansion but also provides an ethnographic account of globalization.

It is important to add here that the notion of “Chinese” when used in this study, does not refer to a single nation-state, be it the PRC or ROC, or other localities such as Hong Kong, Singapore, and the diasporas of Southeast Asia, but to an association with and a cultural and linguistic literacy in a social space that is comprised of links to certain geographic localities, one or more languages (e.g., Mandarin, Taiwanese, Cantonese, etc.), cultural symbols (e.g., Chinese characters), social practices (e.g., the Mid-Autumn Festival or Lunar New Year), and discourses (e.g., filial piety). I thus understand Chineseness as a relational concept. The term “Chinese” is used in this book as an umbrella term that will be further specified when needed (PRC Chinese, Taiwanese, Hong Kongese, SEA Chinese, second-generation Chinese American, etc.). Yet it is equally important to stress that although from the etic perspective of this study an essentialist understanding of “Chineseness” as a fixed ethnic entity is avoided, this might not be the case for some of the actors in the field.¹¹ While for this research the socially-constructed, “relational” character of Chineseness

⁹ Marcus, “Ethnography in/of the World System”, p. 96.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 99.

¹¹ G. Baumann, “Nation, Ethnicity and Community”, in: K. Knott and S. McLoughlin (eds.), *Diasporas: Concepts, Intersections, Identities*, London: Zed, 2010, p. 46.

is considered in order to overcome the oversimplifying dichotomy of Chinese and non-Chinese (or “Western”, “African”, etc.) and thereby do justice to the more complex, layered, and fractured relationships that occur within the overseas temple space, it is important to note that, to many, though not all, of the people I talked to in my fieldwork, Chineseness does feel primordial. In fact, as I will show in this book, Fo Guang Shan plays an active role in the production of global yet multivalent renderings of Chineseness; some more open and cosmopolitan, others more ethno-parochial. In addition to holding grand cultural activities compatible with global tourism and event culture that are open to everyone regardless of their ethnic background, Fo Guang Shan also provides many programmes for the second and later generations that are intended to foster both their Chinese language ability and their ethno-cultural identity. Within this context it is important to note that the majority of Fo Guang Shan Buddhists overseas are first generation migrants. During my fieldwork, I have encountered a multiplicity of self-identifications, yet it is of significance that within the Fo Guang Shan overseas temple space, the parlance of “we Chinese” is the most common.¹²

This study considers the complex and layered character of the ethnic Chinese diaspora while at the same time taking seriously emic claims of a common sense of Chineseness. Anthropologist Nina Glick-Schiller reminds us that, besides giving attention to the within-group variation, another way to avoid the danger of the “ethnic lens,” the risk of reifying ethnicity by overlooking the internal differences of ethnic groups and possible more complex forms of national and ethnic identity, is to enter the analysis spatially. Instead of taking for granted that ethnicity is the master organizing identity for a particular group, she recommends researchers to start with small scale spatial units.¹³ Accordingly, this research has taken the physical spaces of three overseas temples, Nan Hua Temple in South Africa, Hsi Lai Temple in the USA, and Da Jue Ancestral Temple in the PRC as the main units of analysis for Fo Guang Shan’s globalization project.

The Field Sites: Hsi Lai, Nan Hua, Da Jue

Hsi Lai Temple is the flagship overseas temple of Fo Guang Shan. Although it is not the biggest in size, it has the longest history and is probably the most

¹² While some prefer *huaren* 華人, most people I spoke to used the expression *Zhongguo ren* 中國人.

¹³ N. Glick-Schiller, A. Çağlar, and T. C. Guldbrandsen, “Beyond the Ethnic Lens: Locality, Globality, and Born-Again Incorporation”, *American Ethnologist* 33 (2006) 4, p. 613.

industrious.¹⁴ Hsi Lai Temple – besides a whole range of temple activities, too many to be listed here – runs a publishing company, a columbarium, and even a liberal arts university. The temple is also where the main office of the BLIA is located. The reason for the temple's prosperity and importance within the order's global temple network is location. Hsi Lai Temple is located in Hacienda Heights, an unincorporated suburban community of Los Angeles that is part of the earliest suburban Chinese neighbourhood, or ethnoburb, in the United States.¹⁵ Today, the BLIA Los Angeles local chapter (*xiehui* 協會) has 23 subchapters. The Los Angeles local chapter includes LA County, Orange County, and San Bernardino County. Most of the subchapters are formed based on geographic locality, but some are based on special characteristics such as language. In total, the LA chapter has about 1800 members. In the beginning, most devotees were from Taiwan, but over time more and more ethnic Chinese from Southeast Asia and Hong Kong migrated to LA. These changes, which were caused by the changing US immigration regulations for specific countries, are also reflected in the BLIA membership. The membership of several of the subchapters consists mostly of Southeast Asian ethnic Chinese who speak Cantonese. Many of them are Sino-Vietnamese. There is also a more recent rise in PRC Chinese. Although most of the BLIA's leadership originate from Taiwan or Southeast Asia, some of the presidents and vice-presidents of subchapters from the more affluent South Bay area come from the PRC. The PRC Chinese are even better represented in the youth groups. The Hsi Lai Temple runs two youth groups or Fo Guang Shan Young Adult Divisions (YAD). One particularly serves foreign exchange students, the majority of which comes from the People's Republic. The other youth group targets second and later generations of ethnic Chinese migrants. Many of their parents come from Taiwan. Another subchapter is an English language chapter with many non-Chinese members. Some of its members are of European descent and some are Asian Americans. There are also several members with a South- or Central-American background, which reflects the demographics in the neighbourhoods that surround the temple. The backgrounds of the visitors who visit the temple every day are very diverse. The temple provides docents who give temple tours for those visitors who want to learn more about Buddhism. Other visitors come to Hsi Lai Temple to enjoy the traditional Chinese architecture or to have lunch at the dining hall.

¹⁴ All information in the following section, unless otherwise referenced, is based on fieldwork data.

¹⁵ The concept of the "ethnoburb" was developed by US geographer Wei Li. It will be discussed in more detail in chapter three. W. Li, *Ethnoburb: The New Ethnic Community in Urban America*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2011.

Some, mostly but not exclusively Asian Americans, come to the temple to pray or to partake in one of the many religious activities. On an average weekend day there are up to 100 volunteers who help out.

Fo Guang Shan's global development began in the USA. Hsing Yun first visited the country with a monastic delegation in 1976 to participate in the USA's bicentennial festivities. During this time, Hsing Yun and his travel companions visited several lay as well as monastic representatives of the ethnic Chinese community.¹⁶ Shortly after the visit, one of the overseas Chinese he had met invited Hsing Yun to establish a temple. Although Hsing Yun sent two of his nuns over, in the end the project was unsuccessful. Despite its failure, Hsing Yun decided that Fo Guang Shan should try to develop a presence in the US anyway and flew over himself. After some back and forth, he decided to take out a loan to buy a church building they could use. This building became the first Hsi Lai Temple.¹⁷ The project turned out to be quite successful and attracted many followers. But the temple's lack of cooking facilities quickly became an issue, as devotees visiting a Mahayana temple often expect to be given a free vegetarian lunch after the Dharma assembly. They therefore bought another, larger, former church building with a kitchen. Hsing Yun called it White Pagoda Temple (*Baita si* 白塔寺).¹⁸ White Pagoda Temple turned out to be an even greater success, though it too soon became too small for their needs. Hsing Yun therefore decided to build a new temple complex from scratch.¹⁹ They purchased a suitable plot of land in Hacienda Heights and construction began. Fo Guang Shan encountered considerable opposition to construction. Some locals were suspicious of the foreign temple architecture, though the official line was that they feared traffic and pollution problems. At the same time, other Taiwanese-American religious groups, Buddhists as well as Christians, also tried to prevent construction.²⁰ However, in the end Fo Guang Shan succeeded and the new temple was inaugurated in 1988.²¹

The temple is built on a hillside and its characteristically Chinese temple architecture is widely visible from afar. The buildings of the complex are arranged in the shape of a leaf of the Bodhi tree, the tree under which the historical Buddha is said to have reached awakening (see Figure 2). Several of the houses that surround

¹⁶ Hsing Yun, *Bai nian foyuan* 百年佛緣, vol. 10, Kaohsiung: Foguang chubanshe, 2013, pp. 19–29.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 31–38.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 40–41.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 46–49.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 50.



Figure 2: Map of Hsi Lai Temple, Hsi Lai Temple, USA.

the temple belong to Fo Guang Shan or are inhabited by devotees. There is a big parking lot behind the main gate right in front of the temple to accommodate the visitors. The first row of buildings houses the Buddha's Light Hsi Lai School, the BLIA office, and, in the centre, the Bodhisattva Hall (*Wusheng dian* 五聖殿). To enter the temple complex, visitors have to first pass through the Bodhisattva Hall. Behind the hall lies the main courtyard of Hsi Lai Temple. To the right of the courtyard lie a small conference room, the Avalokitesvara Garden, an assembly hall, another meeting hall, and the auditorium. To the left are the information centre, the so-called Harmony Hall where the Hsi Lai orchestra has its rehearsals, the Arhat Garden, the main conference room, the Hsi Lai Art Gallery, and a teahouse with a bookstore. On the other side of the yard, across from the Bodhisattva Hall and above the dining hall is the main shrine. Behind the main shrine are the meditation hall and a memorial pagoda. Hsi Lai is the busiest of all the order's overseas temples. Activities range from cultural festivities on traditional Chinese and American holidays, to religious activities such as Dharma assemblies and meditation, to charity and educational endeavours.

Fo Guang Shan maintains eight facilities on the African continent.²² Six of them including Nan Hua Temple, the order's African headquarters, are situated in South Africa.²³ The other two centres are located in Lesotho and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Accordingly, the BLIA runs eight local chapters attached to these temples and practice centres. BLIA South Africa has about 1000 adult members in total and runs a youth group, which was founded in 1997. Nan Hua Temple's extensive complex is located in Bronkhorstspuit, a small town about 50 km from Pretoria, one of South Africa's three capitals and the seat of the administrative branch of the national government. Despite the temple's role as the order's most important facility in Africa today, Fo Guang Shan's development in South Africa did not begin in Bronkhorstspuit.

Prior to the construction of Nan Hua Temple in 1992, the order had already settled in Newcastle.²⁴ Taiwanese had already begun to migrate to South Africa in the 1970s. While the first group of migrants consisting of Taiwanese industrialists settled in rural areas, the so-called "homelands", Taiwanese communities were subsequently established in cities like Newcastle, Bloemfontein, Durban, and Ladybrand.²⁵ To this day these cities are still home to Taiwanese communities and Fo Guang Shan practice centres. Bronkhorstspuit on the other hand, though situated not far from Pretoria and Johannesburg, did not host a Taiwanese community prior to the construction of Nan Hua Temple. Seeking to attract Taiwanese investment, the local government donated a 12-hectare parcel of land to Fo Guang Shan.²⁶ In exchange for the land, Hsing Yun agreed to assist in attracting 550 Taiwanese investors into the country. The investors could buy a small plot on which to build a family home, and after four years of residence, they and their families would be granted permanent residency. The idea was to develop a suburban Taiwanese residential area, or "Platteland Chinatown". South Africa would benefit from an influx of investment, the Taiwanese could live in a newly developed residential area with clean air and low living costs, and the temple would be integrated into a Taiwanese community. However, matters did not turn out as planned. The end of Apartheid brought a new government that wanted to

22 The section on Nan Hua Temple has been previously published in J. Reinke, "The Buddha in Bronkhorstspuit: The Transnational Spread of the Taiwanese Buddhist Order Fo Guang Shan to South Africa", *Contemporary Buddhism* 3 (2020) 2, pp. 1–18.

23 All information in the following section, unless otherwise referenced, is based on fieldwork data.

24 Hsing Yun, *Bai nian foyuan*, vol. 10, p. 260.

25 Y. J. Park, "Recent Chinese Migrations to South Africa: New Intersections of Race, Class and Ethnicity", in: T. Rahimy (ed.), *Representation, Expression and Identity: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2009, p. 155.

26 Hsing Yun, *Bai nian foyuan*, vol. 10, p. 262.

renegotiate the conditions for the Taiwanese investors, and eventually, when South Africa terminated its diplomatic relations with Taiwan in favour for the People's Republic of China, plans for the development of the Taiwanese suburb were abandoned.²⁷ Thus today, although traditionally designed Chinese gates mark the entrances to the area and the streets still bear Chinese names, it is members of the new black South African middle class instead of Taiwanese families that inhabit many of the buildings around the temple complex.

Despite the setbacks, the development of Fo Guang Shan in South Africa continued. In 1993, a year after construction work on Nan Hua Temple began, Fo Guang Shan's first meditation centre, the Newcastle Meditation Centre, was completed. In addition, the first preparatory BLIA meeting in South Africa took place. Centre constructions and BLIA preparatory meetings in Bloemfontein, Johannesburg, Durban, and Cape Town followed shortly after.²⁸ Meanwhile in Bronkhorstspuit the construction of Nan Hua Temple continued. The Nan Hua Temple Guest House (*Chaoshan huiguan* 朝山會館, sometimes also translated as "Pilgrimage Lodge") was completed in 1994 and a year later construction of the main shrine began. Ten years later, in 2005, the shrine was formally inaugurated by a leading Fo Guang Shan monastic.²⁹

Today, the temple proper together with the Nan Hua Temple Guest House constitute the heart of the temple complex. The guest house is a round, two-story building built around a circular courtyard. The first floor hosts a reception area, a gift shop, an exhibition space, office spaces, a dining hall, a kitchen, and a meditation hall. On the second floor are a teahouse, the living quarters of the monastics and of some of the temple's long-term volunteers, guestrooms, a library, and a shrine room devoted to the bodhisattva Manjushri. The shrine room is also where the daily morning services are held. Located right next to the Nan Hua Guest House is Nan Hua Village (*Nanhua cun* 南華村), which consists of a group of bungalows. Some of these house long-term volunteers, while others serve as guestrooms when the temple hosts big events, such as Dharma assemblies or meditation retreats. The Nan Hua Temple Guest House and Village are surrounded by a wall with a guarded gate facing the road. Located on the same road are several more buildings that belong to the temple: the temple proper with the main shrine, the Nan Hua Academy (*Nanhua jiaoxue zhongxin* 南華教學中心), and the school building used by the Nan Hua Performing

²⁷ Chandler, *Establishing a Pure Land on Earth*, pp. 294–295.

²⁸ Hsing Yun, *Bai nian foyuan*, vol. 10, p. 267.

²⁹ Foguangshan zongwu weiyuanhui 佛光山宗務委員會 (ed.), *Foguangshan kaishan sishi zhounian jinian tekan* 佛光山開山四十週年紀念特刊, vol. 8, Kaohsiung: Foguang wenhua, 2008, p. 203.

Arts Group (*Tianlong dui* 天龍隊). A little further down the road are dormitories for the Nan Hua Performing Arts Group students and non-Chinese temple staff, beyond which lies a meditation centre currently not in use. While the school building, Nan Hua Academy, Nan Hua Village bungalows and dorms are simple and functional in style, the architectural style of the two biggest buildings – the Nan Hua Temple Guest House and the temple proper (see Figure 3) – is clearly Chinese. Yet there are also some scattered African design elements to be found. The most obvious one is the “African Lapa”, a small, round building that emulates the traditional local architecture and serves as a practice space for the Nan Hua Performing Arts Group. The outer walls of the building are adorned with paintings of South African animals and also depict scenes of black African Buddhist monks meditating, practicing martial arts, or receiving their ordination. The other building that contains South African design features is the main shrine of the temple proper. While the temple design follows the common pattern of Chinese Buddhist temple architecture, the shrine hall also incorporates local design elements such as African geometric patterns on the ceiling, warrior figurines that form part of the walls, and thatched roof elements above the three main Buddhas on the altar. Another feature that stands out is the design of the three Buddha statues. As is common in many Fo Guang Shan temples,



Figure 3: Main Shrine, Nan Hua Temple, South Africa.

the three Buddha statues in the main shrine are the Buddha Amitabha, Buddha Shakyamuni, and the Medicine Buddha. Yet what is different about the Buddha statues at the Nan Hua Temple is their colour. The statues are made of a dark wood and only the hair and the robes are coloured. This gives the impression of dark brown skin, which, as a monastic told me, was intentional in order to make them appear like black African Buddhas.

Besides organizing religious activities, like meditation retreats or Dharma assemblies, Fo Guang Shan is involved in a variety of charity, educational, and cultural endeavours in South Africa. Some target the Taiwanese and rapidly growing PRC Chinese communities, while others aim to address the country's diverse middle class consisting of black, coloured, white, Indian, and Chinese South Africans. And finally, still further activities are meant to provide support for the inhabitants of the more rural, tribal, and often impoverished regions of the country. These diverse social engagements generate Nan Hua Temple's complex entanglements with South Africa's ethnically pluralistic host society, including the country's increasingly diverse Chinese diaspora communities.

At present, there are two main projects at the Nan Hua Temple designed to address the third of the above-mentioned demographics: the Nan Hua Academy and Nan Hua Performing Arts Group. The Nan Hua Academy is an educational institution that provides free three-month computer and Mandarin language courses for unemployed residents of neighbouring townships. The goal is to provide an education that will be beneficial in their search for employment. The Nan Hua Performing Arts Group is a performing-arts boarding school for young women who live in underdeveloped and rural areas. Both institutions will be further discussed in chapter five of this book. Besides the students of the Nan Hua Performing Arts Group, there are about a dozen monastics from Taiwan, over a dozen long-term volunteers from Taiwan and the PRC, and some staff who live at the temple. Additionally, there are more than 30 locals working as manual labourers, kitchen helpers, and cleaning staff at the temple during the daytime.

The last of the primary field sites is Fo Guang Shan Ancestral Da Jue Temple in Yixing city in Jiangsu province in the People's Republic of China. Fo Guang Shan's development in the People's Republic represents the most recent stage of the order's global development. Today, Fo Guang Shan operates nine facilities across the country. The most important of these is the order's Ancestral Temple in Yixing. Seven of Fo Guang Shan's other facilities are also located in the Jiangnan area. Fo Guang Shan runs two enterprises in Shanghai: a publishing company (*Shanghai dajue wenhua chuanbo* 上海大覺文化傳播) and a cultural centre (*Xingyun wenjiao guan* 星雲文教館). In Suzhou, the order operates the Jiaying Assembly Hall (*Jiaying huiguan* 嘉應會館), a traditional house that serves

as a space for exhibitions and cultural classes. Fo Guang Shan also maintains a library (*Jianzhen tushu guan* 鑒真圖書館) in Yangzhou (揚州) and a branch of its Water Drop teahouse chain in Wuxi (無錫). In Nanjing, the order has the Flower Rain Abode (*Yuhua jingshe* 雨花精舍) and, at the time of writing this book, is reconstructing the Tianlong Temple (*Tianlong si* 天龍寺). Finally, the order runs a cultural centre (*Guangzhong wenjiao guan* 光中文教館) in Beijing. As is the case in most Buddhist temples, there are lay volunteers in the PRC who donate their time and labour to Fo Guang Shan's facilities. Many lay Buddhists serve as volunteers, particularly at Da Jue Temple. However, these volunteers are not members of a bigger institution, since the BLIA does not exist in the People's Republic of China.

Da Jue Temple has a long history dating back to the Southern Song. The temple was first constructed between 1265 and 1274 under the Linji (臨濟) lineage of Chan (禪) Buddhism.³⁰ Hsing Yun had stayed at Da Jue Temple – the ancestral temple of his tonsure master Shikai – for a short time prior to leaving for Taiwan in 1949. It was only in the 1980s that Hsing Yun began to reconnect with the Buddhist world of the PRC. In 1986, at the sixtieth birthday celebrations of Thailand's King Bhumibol Adulyadej (1927–2016), he met Zhao Puchu (趙樸初, 1907–2000), who was at that time President of the Buddhist Association of China (*Zhongguo fojiao xiehui* 中國佛教協會).³¹ Two years later, Fo Guang Shan organized the sixteenth World Fellowship of Buddhists meeting at Hsi Lai Temple to which Buddhist representatives from both China and Taiwan were invited.³² In 1989, Hsing Yun made his first visit to the mainland in 40 years.³³ It was on this trip that he finally had the chance to visit his ancestral temple again. When he saw the state of the buildings, he vowed that one day he would rebuild the temple.³⁴ Yet, events in the aftermath of the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests delayed the realization of his vow. Hsing Yun had welcomed Xu Jiataun (許家屯 1916–2016) into residence at the Hsi Lai Temple. Xu was a former high-ranking Chinese politician who became a dissident after he voiced support for the student protests. The incident caused Hsing Yun to be banned from visiting the People's Republic.³⁵ Interactions between Fo Guang Shan and the PRC Buddhist world did not resume until the 2000s, a decade later. Most notably, between 2002 and 2004 several

30 Shi Miaopu, *Foguang zuting da jue 10 nian: 2005–2015* 佛光祖庭大覺10年: 2005–2015, Yixing: Dajue si, 2015, p. 4.

31 Fu, *Bright Star, Luminous Cloud*, pp. 273–274.

32 Ibid., pp. 274–275.

33 Ibid., p. 276.

34 Shi Miaopu, *Foguang zuting da jue 10 nian*, p. 21.

35 Chandler, *Establishing a Pure Land on Earth*, pp. 256–258.

exchanges took place between the two sides.³⁶ Hsing Yun managed to establish good relations not just with Buddhists, but also with PRC political circles. He has met four PRC presidents in person, namely Yang Shangkun (楊尚昆), Jiang Zemin (江澤民), Hu Jintao (胡錦濤), and the current president Xi Jinping (習近平). Xi Jinping and Hsing Yun met have met in person on four occasions: in 2006, 2013, 2014, and 2015.³⁷

Hsing Yun's good connections paid off when, in 2004, Yixing's local government finally agreed to rebuild Da Jue Temple on the shore of Hengshan reservoir *Hengshan shuiku* (橫山水庫) on the outskirts of Yixing. Construction began in October 2005 and in March 2007 the temple was officially awarded religious site status by the Bureau of Religious Affairs *Zongjiao bu* (宗教部). The first phase of construction took place from 2005 to 2007, when the Guanyin Hall, an art museum, the teahouse, a guesthouse, and the dining hall were built. Meanwhile, the local government built streets to connect the temple with the city. During the second building phase, from 2007 to 2011, the main gate, the Park of the 18 Arhats, and the main shrine flanked by two buildings were constructed. In the third construction phase, from 2012 to 2015, the Fragrant Forest Abundant Treasure White Pagoda was added, housing a teahouse, a museum, office spaces, VIP accommodation, and Hsing Yun's private apartment. In the fourth phase, which was still underway during my fieldwork, and which started in 2015, problems with Guanyin Hall's foundations were discovered. As a result, Fo Guang Shan had to rebuild it. The new complex will be bigger than the original and contain a sutra repository, a museum for religious history and arts, an auditorium, a pilgrimage lodge, and other facilities.³⁸

³⁶ Fu, *Bright Star, Luminous Cloud*, pp. 270–271.

³⁷ Shi Miaopu, *Foguang zuting dajue 10 nian*, p. 53.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 21.