

The Many Transnationalisms of *Renjian* Buddhism

Catholics and Protestants have built churches all around the world, so why can't Foguangshan?¹ Hsing Yun

Buddhist history is characterized by mobilities and border-crossings. After emerging in South Asia, Buddhism entered China via Central and Southeast Asia, from where it spread further into other parts of East Asia. It is thus no surprise that the modern Chinese Buddhist reform movement of *renjian* Buddhism continues to be a very mobile tradition. Yet what differentiates *renjian* Buddhist mobilities from their predecessors is the centrality of the category of the nation-state. *Renjian* Buddhist mobilities are highly transnational in their nature. In contrast to other terms, such as the translocal or the transregional, the notion of transnationalism emphasises border-crossings while also maintaining the importance of the nation-state. Transnationalism is furthermore different from “the international” in that the latter applies to the relationships between states and governments, while the former refers to the border-crossings of non-state actors and the resulting continuous interconnections and exchanges.²

Renjian Buddhism has its roots in the turbulent and highly transnational era that stretches from the first Opium War (1839–1842) to the founding of the People's Republic in 1949. This period, which in Chinese scholarship is considered to represent the beginning of modern China (*jindai* 近代), is marked by a complex net of multifaceted, multidirectional transnational entanglements that link China, Japan, the countries of the West and their colonial spheres of influence in Southeast Asia and elsewhere. During the nineteenth century, Chinese society experienced a series of crises – some external, caused by the political, economic, missionary, and military globalization projects of Western imperialism³; others internal, such as the Taiping (1851–1864) and other rebellions⁴ – in the aftermath of which the Qing Dynasty collapsed and the Republic was founded. China's encounter with the Western powers, which, to use a Chinese expression, threatened to slice up the country like a melon,⁵ resulted in an infusion of Western ideas and people that challenged many viewpoints held by the

1 Chandler, *Establishing a Pure Land on Earth*, p. 275.

2 S. Vertovec, *Transnationalism*, Key Ideas, London: Routledge, 2009, p. 3.

3 J. D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, New York: Norton, 1991, chapter 7.

4 *Ibid.*, chapter 8.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 231. For the history of the metaphor, see R. G. Wagner, “‘Dividing up the [Chinese] Melon, guafen 瓜分’: The Fate of a Transcultural Metaphor in the Formation of National Myth”, *Journal of Transcultural Studies* 8 (2017) 1, pp. 9–122.

Chinese.⁶ The resulting attempt to socially, intellectually, institutionally, and politically reconstruct China as a modern nation-state had many repercussions for religious life. New Western concepts reflected in Japanese neologisms such as “religion” (*zongjiao* 宗教) and “superstition” (*mixin* 迷信) were introduced into the Chinese language. These concepts remodelled the space for religion within society, by taking the Christian-secular model as point of reference.⁷ Religion was understood in a Western “post-reformation” sense of a system of doctrine organized as a church that contributes to the society of a modern nation-state. It was thereby differentiated from another imported concept, namely superstition.⁸ The state developed new religious policies that reordered the religious field by applying a complex blend of repression, disregard, and cooperation. Those traditions and practices that were classified as superstition were suppressed.⁹ Others that were labelled as religions had to contribute to the transformation of the country into a modern nation-state.¹⁰ The main area for religious traditions to become engaged in this process were education and welfare.

In China, religious traditions had of course been involved in welfare long before the nineteenth century.¹¹ Throughout 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, supplementing existing forms of charity provided by the state, Buddhist temples, and local shrines.¹² Similarly, folk religious groups that formed around spirit mediums, whose revelations were sometimes collected and

6 Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, chapter 13; J. K. Fairbank and M. Goldman, *China: A New History*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006, chapter 13.

7 V. Goossaert and D. A. Palmer, *The Religious Question in Modern China*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011, p. 68.

8 *Ibid.*, pp. 50–51.

9 For a study on the anti-superstition campaigns in Jiangsu during the Nanjing decade, see R. Nedostup, *Superstitious Regimes: Religion and the Politics of Chinese Modernity*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009.

10 Goossaert and Palmer, *The Religious Question in Modern China*, p. 67.

11 Parts of the following section have also been published in J. Reinke, “Generating Global Pure Lands: Renjian Buddhist Civic Engagement Within and Beyond Chinese Diaspora Communities Worldwide”, in: P. Clart and A. Jones (eds.), *Transnational Religious Spaces: Religious Organizations and Interactions in Africa, East Asia, and Beyond*, Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2020, pp. 283–303.

12 J. F. Handlin Smith, “Benevolent Societies: The Reshaping of Charity During the Late Ming and Early Ch’ing”, *The Journal of Asian Studies* 46 2 (1987) 2, pp. 309–310.

published in morality books, were involved in charity work.¹³ 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.¹⁴ 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.¹⁵ Charitable institutions based on Confucian ideals, for example, merged with ideas and practices associated with nineteenth- and twentieth-century conceptions of globalized capitalist modernity.¹⁶ Established Chinese traditions were remodelled by these highly transnational processes into modern religions that contributed to the modernization of the country.

Buddhist Border-Crossings during the Age of Colonial Modernity

Buddhist actors responded to the situation in a variety of ways.¹⁷ One way was the modernization of Buddhist education. The lay Buddhist Yang Wenhui (楊文會 1837–1911) reimported many scriptures from Japan that had been lost during the anti-Buddhist devastations of the Taiping Rebellion. He also founded the Jinling Sutra Publishing House (*Jinling kejing chu* 金陵刻經處) and the first modern Buddhist educational institution, the Jetavana Hermitage (*Zhihuan jingshe* 祇洹精舍). Although Yang's Jetavana Hermitage had to close down after only one academic year, it had a lasting influence on the history of modern Chinese Buddhism in China.¹⁸ Many of the students of the Jetavana Hermitage became important figures in the history of the modernization of Chinese Mahayana.

¹³ P. Clart, "The Ritual Context of Morality Books: A Case Study of Taiwanese Spirit-Writing Cult", Ph.D. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1997, p. 41.

¹⁴ H. Welch, *The Buddhist Revival in China*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970, pp. 129–130.

¹⁵ P. Duara, "Religion and Citizenship in China and the Diaspora", in M. M.-H. Yang (ed.), *Chinese Religiosities: Afflictions of Modernity and State Formation*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008, pp. 46–47.

¹⁶ V. Shue, "The Quality of Mercy", *Modern China* 32 (2006) 4, p. 451.

¹⁷ For an overview on the state of Buddhism during this era, see H. Welch, *The Practice of Chinese Buddhism, 1900–1950*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967.

¹⁸ Welch, *The Buddhist Revival in China*, pp. 2–10. For a comprehensive study on Yang's life and influence on modern Chinese Buddhism, see G. Goldfuss, *Vers un bouddhisme du XXe*

The two most prominent alumni of the school are probably the layman Ouyang Jingwu (歐陽竟無 1871–1943)¹⁹ and the monastic Taixu (太虛 1890–1947).²⁰

Yang Wenhui is noteworthy not only because of his famous students but also for his contributions to the revival of Buddhist printing culture. His work can be seen as antecedent to the flourishing of commercial Buddhist printing culture that occurred some decades later in the Republican Era. The spread of the commercial press at that time facilitated the emergence of a new medium, the modern Buddhist periodical. These periodicals became an important tool for Buddhists to engage both with their own community and with the public at large.²¹ Through print culture, Buddhists participated in many of the debates of the time. One particular important discourse at the time centres on the claim that Buddhism is compatible with modern science and is thus a religion that is able to contribute to the modern nation-state.²² Buddhists developed many new ideas and practices that had repercussions on their own modes of religiosity, including but not limited to the fields of music and food.²³ In urban areas such as Shanghai, elite lay

siecle: Yang Wenhui (1837–1911), *réformateur laïque et imprimeur*, Paris: Collège de France, Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises, 2001.

19 For a study on Ouyang's important contribution to the revival of Yogacara, see E. Aviv, "Differentiating the Pearl from the Fish Eye: Ouyang Jingwu (1871–1943) and the Revival of Scholastic Buddhism", Ph.D. thesis, Harvard University, 2008.

20 For a study on Taixu's life, see D. A. Pittman, *Toward a Modern Chinese Buddhism: Taixu's Reforms*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001. Regarding Taixu's time at the Jetavana Hermitage, see pp. 44–45. For the collected works of the reformer, see Taixu, *Taixu dashi quan-shu* 太虛大師全書, ed. by Yinshun, Taipei: Shandao si fojing liutongchu 善導寺佛經流通處, 1998.

21 G. A. Scott, "A Revolution of Ink: Chinese Buddhist Periodicals in the Early Republic", in: J. Kiely and J. Brooks Jessup (eds.), *Recovering Buddhism in Modern China*, New York: Columbia University Press, p. 112, 132. See also G. A. Scott, "Conversion by the Book: Buddhist Print Culture in Early Republican China", Ph.D. thesis, Columbia University, 2013.

22 For a study on Buddhist discussions about the relationship between science and religion during the 1920s and 30s, see E. J. Hammerstrom, *The Science of Chinese Buddhism: Early Twentieth-Century Engagements*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2015; for a study on Buddhist participation in the so called "science and philosophy of life debates", see E. J. Hammerstrom, "Buddhism and the Modern Epistemic Space: Buddhist Intellectuals in the Science and Philosophy of Life Debates", in: Kiely and Jessup (eds.), *Recovering Buddhism in Modern China*, pp. 79–110.

23 P. Clart and G. A. Scott, "Introduction: Print Culture and Religion in Chinese History", in: Clart and Scott (eds.), *Religious Publishing and Print Culture in Modern China: 1800–2012*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015, pp. 1–2. For a study on the cultural practices of Buddhists during the modern era, including print culture, music, and vegetarianism, see F. Tarocco, *The Cultural Practices of Modern Chinese Buddhism: Attuning the Dharma*, London: Routledge, 2010.

Buddhists began to establish new lay Buddhist organizations that combined modern Western as well as Chinese religious discourses and practices.²⁴

Yet despite the new developments, Buddhism was also a target of criticism. Some modernist intellectuals made “traditional Chinese culture” – particularly Confucianism, but also Buddhism, Daoism, and folk religion – responsible for the country’s inability to resist foreign domination.²⁵ Although Confucianism was found to be the main culprit, and some parts of Buddhist doctrine, particularly Yogacara philosophy (*weishi xuepai* 唯識學派), even experienced a revival in Chinese intellectual circles, institutional Buddhism was heavily criticized.²⁶ The monastic sangha was perceived by its critics as being backward, corrupt, and indifferent towards the goal of strengthening the nation.²⁷ Meanwhile, Christianity expanded its field of influence in China. Supported by Western forces, Protestant missionaries proselytized aggressively during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.²⁸ They also criticized Buddhism as superstitious and escapist.²⁹ Most of the missionaries were openly hostile towards Buddhism and held an exclusivist theological attitude.³⁰ Yet the relationship with Christianity was not entirely one of hostility and competition. Christian – and in particular Protestant – civic practices and ideas that were introduced to China by Westerners also constituted an important point of reference for the developers of a modern Chinese Buddhist religiosity. 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.³¹

In addition to such public criticism, institutional Buddhism was threatened by government policies. As early as the 1890s, the government began to confiscate

²⁴ Jessup calls this approach “ambivalent modernity”. See J. Brooks Jessup, “Buddhist Activism, Urban Space, and Ambivalent Modernity in 1920s Shanghai”, in: Kiely and Jessup (eds.), *Recovering Buddhism in Modern China*, p. 71. See also J. Brooks Jessup, “The Householder Elite: Buddhist Activism in Shanghai, 1920–1956”, Ph.D. thesis, University of California, 2010.

²⁵ Pittman, *Toward a Modern Chinese Buddhism*.

²⁶ J. Makeham, “Introduction”, in: Makeham (ed.), *Transforming Consciousness: Yogācāra Thought in Modern China*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 1.

²⁷ Pittman, *Toward a Modern Chinese Buddhism*, p. 28.

²⁸ T. D. DuBois, *Religion and the Making of Modern East Asia*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp. 142–151.

²⁹ G. Fisher, “Buddhism in China and Taiwan”, in: D. L. McMahan (ed.), *Buddhism in the Modern World*, New York: Routledge, 2012, p. 70.

³⁰ Pittman, *Toward a Modern Chinese Buddhism*, pp. 37–40.

³¹ Goossaert and Palmer, *The Religious Question in Modern China*, p. 77.

temple property in order to finance the foundation of modern schools.³² While the potential seizure of temple property by authorities was an ongoing danger to Buddhism during this era, new government policies together with the response of the Buddhist reform movements also facilitated the space for Buddhism as a modern religion in Chinese society.³³ Yet it was not only those Buddhists who would be later classified as progressives or modernizers: all Buddhist monastics, whether modernist or conservative, had to adapt to the new times. In fact, the line between the two factions is not always that clear.

Modernists such as Taixu were particularly receptive to the idea of incorporating Christian civic practices such as establishing hospitals, orphanages, and schools into his project of a modernized Buddhism.³⁴ Yet the more conservative Buddhist mainstream likewise took on what Goossaert and Palmer call the “Christian model” of religiosity. They too drew up plans (albeit not always realising them) 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.³⁵ Yet although Buddhists emulated some Protestant practices and ideas, they also distanced themselves from others. Furthermore, even in those areas where there appear to be similarities, the links are not all that clear. Some of the similarities between *renjian* Buddhist and Christian social involvements represent analogous developments that occurred due to similar circumstances.³⁶ Thus, for Chinese Buddhists, the role of Christianity was more that of a general reference point for a modern religiosity than merely a model to replicate.

Christians served as an important example particularly in regard to their contributions to education and charity. By 1914, Christians were running 11,545 elementary schools and 542 universities in China.³⁷ Buddhists tried to catch up and became involved in education, too. Yet they did so on a much smaller scale. They modernized the education system of the monastic *sangha*, and

³² Ibid., p. 44.

³³ Y. Ashiwa, “Positioning Religion in Modernity: State and Buddhism in China”, in: Y. Ashiwa and D. L. Wank (eds.), *Making Religion, Making the State: The Politics of Religion in Modern China*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009, pp. 43–73.

³⁴ D. Long, “An Interfaith Dialogue between the Chinese Buddhist Leader Taixu and Christians”, *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 20 (2000), p. 184.

³⁵ Goossaert and Palmer, *The Religious Question in Modern China*, p. 82.

³⁶ Y. Yao and R. Gombrich, “Christianity as Model and Analogue in the Formation of the ‘Humanistic’ Buddhism of Tàì Xū and Hsing Yún”, *Buddhist Studies Review* 34 (2017) 2, p. 205.

³⁷ Goossaert and Palmer, *The Religious Question in Modern China*, p. 77.

some temples also established local community schools.³⁸ But because of political restrictions imposed by the KMT and later by the CCP, Buddhists had greater difficulty founding universities. Even today, there are still no Buddhist universities in the PRC. In Taiwan, it would take Chinese Buddhists until the late 1980s to succeed in establishing their own universities. In fact, Fo Guang Shan was one of the first Buddhist organizations that received permission from the Taiwanese state to realize this aim.³⁹ 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 relating to the importance of education for the building of the modern nation-state. However, he also mentions legal obligations: new laws introduced in 1929 and strengthened in 1935 forced monasteries to contribute a certain portion of their income to charitable enterprises.⁴⁰

Although Buddhists from all backgrounds and factions were involved in the adaptation of their tradition to the changing times, one monastic came to be perceived as the embodiment of the modernist Buddhist monk: Hsing Yun's teacher, Taixu.⁴¹ Taixu, together with a new generation of monastics, aimed to thoroughly reform Chinese Mahayana by promoting a big array of reforms. Today, there exists a constantly growing body of scholarship on different aspects of the complex and multifaceted life and thought of this modernist monastic. Each study foregrounds different aspects, for example his role as a reformer of modern monastic education and the sangha, or as a political activist and utopian thinker who merged socialist, anarchist, and later nationalist theory with Buddhist doctrine and practice.⁴² It is important to emphasise that

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

39 Jiang C. 江燦騰, *Renshi Taiwan bentu fojiao* 認識臺灣本土佛教, Taipei: Taiwan shangwu 台灣商務, 2012, p. 110.

40 Welch, *The Buddhist Revival in China*, chapter 7.

41 Despite being influenced by the modernizer's ideas during his time studying at the Buddhist Institute at Jiaoshan, Hsing Yun had only very limited direct contact with Taixu. Nevertheless, Taixu's ideas had a strong influence on him. D. Long, "Humanistic Buddhism from Venerable Tai Xu to Grand Master Hsing Yun", *Hsi Lai Journal of Humanistic Buddhism* 1 (2000), pp. 66–67.

42 The following examples only represent a small selection of the studies on the reformer. For a comprehensive study on the life and thought of Taixu, see Pittman, *Toward a Modern Chinese Buddhism*. On Taixu's educational reforms and a newly emerging generation of

Taixu did not just passively accept Christian or Western ideas, but instead incorporated them into his Buddhist worldview. For example, he reinvented the Maitreya cult by merging traditional Buddhist ritual practices linked to the goal of rebirth in Maitreya's Tusita heaven with activist engagement within the secular world.⁴³ One of the key concepts that Taixu developed in the context of his reform project is the "pure land in the human realm" (*renjian jingtu* 人間淨土) or Pure Land on Earth, as it is commonly translated by his students. The concept combines notions of the pure lands in the Chinese Buddhist canon – the popular western pure land of the Buddha Amitabha, but also Maitreya's abode in the Tusita Heaven – with many utopian elements, including socialist, Marxist, and anarchist ones that were popular at the time. Deemphasizing the understanding of a pure land as a place to seek rebirth in after death, *renjian* Buddhists taught that the actual world at hand ought to be transformed into a pure land. The concept continues to be an important tenet of *renjian* Buddhism today.

Together with his student, the scholar monk Yinshun (印順 1906–2005),⁴⁴ Taixu is commonly portrayed as the creator of *renjian* Buddhism, or, in English,

student monks, see R. Lai, "Praying for the Republic" and R. Lai, "The Wuchang Ideal: Buddhist Education and Identity Production in Republican China", *Studies in Chinese Religions* 3 (2017) 1, pp. 55–70; for a study on the relationship between Taixu and Yuanying, the leader of the conservative faction of the Buddhist sangha, and their influence on the Buddhist world in Taiwan, see Shi Huiyan 釋慧嚴, "Taixu, Yuanying er dashi yu Taiwan fojiao-jie" 太虛、圓瑛二大師與臺灣佛教界, *Chung-Hwa Buddhist Journal* 17 (2004), pp. 215–242; for Taixu and *renjian* Buddhism, see E. Goodell, "Taixu's (1890–1947) Creation of Humanistic Buddhism", Ph.D. thesis, University of Virginia, 2012; for Taixu's merging of Buddhism with radical political thought, see J. Ritzinger, *Anarchy in the Pure Land: Reinventing the Cult of Maitreya in Modern Chinese Buddhism*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2017; for Taixu and nationalism, see X. Yu, *Buddhism, War and Nationalism: Chinese Monks in the Struggle against Japanese Aggressions, 1931–1945*, London: Routledge, 2009, pp. 177–187.

⁴³ Ritzinger, *Anarchy in the Pure Land*, p. 123.

⁴⁴ There is just as much scholarship on Yinshun as exists on Taixu. For a comprehensive study on his life and thought, see M. Bingenheimer, "Der Mönchsgelehrte Yinshun und seine Bedeutung für den Chinesisch-Taiwanesischen Buddhismus des 20. Jahrhunderts", Ph.D. thesis, Julius Maximilians Universität, 2004. For a study on Yinshun's influence on the development of Buddhist studies in Taiwan, see Y.-C. Li, "In Pursuit of Buddhahood: Master Yinshun and the Buddhist Study in Postwar Taiwan", in: Xu, Chen, and Meeks (eds.), *Development and Practice of Humanitarian Buddhism: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, Hualien: Tzu Chi University Press, 2007, pp. 173–96; for studies on the doctrinal thought of Yinshun, see S. Travagnin, "The Madhyamika Dimension of Yinshun: A Restatement of the School of Nagarjuna in 20th Century Chinese Buddhism", Ph.D. thesis, SOAS University of London, 2009, and 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) 2, pp. 320–343; see also W. Chu, "A Buddha-Shaped Hole: Yinshun's (1906–2005): Critical Buddhology and the Theological Crisis in

Buddhism of the human realm.⁴⁵ According to Buddhist doctrine, our world is subdivided into six realms: the realm of the gods, *asuras* (or half-gods in Sanskrit), humans, animals, hungry ghosts, and hells. For Taixu and the Buddhist reformers, Buddhism in the past had been overly preoccupied with ghosts and death. By calling their reform project Buddhism of the human realm, the modernizers instead emphasized that it is the realm of the humans, and thereby society, that constitutes the most crucial space for Buddhist practice.⁴⁶ Another term used by Taixu and his disciples is “human life Buddhism” (*rensheng fojiao* 人生佛教). Similar to *renjian* Buddhism, the term emphasizes the importance Buddhism for the living. Although Taixu used both terms in his writings, in Taiwanese scholarship, *rensheng* Buddhism is mostly associated with Taixu, while the term *renjian* Buddhism is attributed to his student Yinshun.⁴⁷ Today, the contemporary heirs of the movement prevailingly use *renjian* Buddhism. But no matter which of the two terms is applied, the main characteristic of this modern Buddhist religiosity is its new emphasis on involvement in, and contribution to, the society of the modern nation-state. In other words, what makes *renjian* Buddhism modern is that it constitutes a socially-engaged Buddhist religiosity.

In the context of Western Buddhist studies, the term socially-engaged Buddhism is often applied to contemporary Buddhists who promote socially progressive causes such as environmentalism, pacifism, social justice, etc. Typical examples are the Vietnamese monastic Thich Nhat Hanh, the Dalai Lama, and the Thai Buddhist intellectual Sulak Sivaraksa.⁴⁸ Within this context, socially-engaged Buddhism is often used as a normative term. However, Jessica Main and Lai Rongdao argue for a more descriptive, and thus analytical,

Modern Chinese Buddhism”, Ph.D. thesis, UCLA, 2006; S. Hurley, “The Doctrinal Transformation of Twentieth-Century Chinese Buddhism: Master Yinshun’s Interpretation of the Tathagatagarbha Doctrine”, *Contemporary Buddhism* 5 (2004) 1, pp. 29–46.

45 S. Pacey, “A Buddhism for the Human World: Interpretations of Renjian Fojiao in Contemporary Taiwan”, *Asian Studies Review* 29 (2005) 4, p. 447.

46 That is why *renjian* Buddhism is also often referred to as “Buddhism that enters the world” *rushi fojiao* 入世佛教. However, it is important to note that the modernizers did not deny the existence of the other realms.

47 M. Bingenheimer, “Some Remarks on the Usage of Renjian Fojiao and the Contribution of Venerable Yinshun to Chinese Buddhist Modernism”, in Xu, Chen, and Meeks (eds.), *Development and Practice of Humanitarian Buddhism*, pp. 145–151. For a discussion of the terms in Taiwanese Buddhism, see Yang H. 楊惠南, “Cong rensheng fojiao dao renjian fojiao” 從人生佛教到人間佛教, in: Yang H. (ed.), *Dangdai fojiao sixiang zhanwang* 當代佛教思想展望, Taipei: Dongda 東大, 2006, pp. 75–125.

48 C. S. Queen and S. B. King (eds.), *Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996; S. B. King, *Socially Engaged Buddhism*, Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2009.

application of “Socially Engaged Buddhism” as a term.⁴⁹ They note that the current normative usage says more about the moral presuppositions of the specific labeller than the characteristics of the movement. It thereby fails to acknowledge the many historic continuities and linkages of socially-engaged Buddhist movements in Asia in the first and second half of the twentieth century.⁵⁰ For pre-Second World War socially-engaged Buddhists in Asia, nationalism was one of the most central tenets of their Buddhist reform movements. The Vietnamese monastic Thich Nhat Hanh for example, who had introduced the term “engaged Buddhism” into the English language during the 1960s, became famous for his pacifist agenda. However, less attention is paid to the fact that he himself was influenced by his reading of Taixu. He even sees his socially-engaged Buddhist movement as a continuation of earlier forms of Vietnamese Buddhist nationalism.⁵¹ The issue becomes even clearer when it comes to Taixu himself. While the younger Taixu was influenced by utopian and leftist ideas, over time the reformer became closely associated with the Nationalist movement.⁵² Yet no matter on which side of the political spectrum he was situated at any given time of his life, social engagement was always a key tenet of his modernist Buddhism.

As is pointed out by Prasenjit Duara, the notion of modernization is strongly linked to the idea of the nation as the sovereign subject of history.⁵³ Yet Duara also emphasizes the plurality of nationalisms. There is never just one form of nationalism, instead nationalism “rather marks the site where different representations of the nation contest and negotiate with each other”.⁵⁴ Different nationalisms thus result from different views held within the same nation on what constitutes (or should constitute) that nation.⁵⁵ An enormous variety of Chinese nationalist world-views has existed ever since the Republican Era. There are significant differences between the evolving views on the nation held by Republican-Era Buddhists such as Taixu, the nationalisms of political parties such as the KMT at different stages of the twentieth century, or the Chinese Dream (*Zhongguo meng* 中國夢) espoused by Xi Jinping today. Yet what they have in common is that they are each linked to a vision of China as a modern nation-state. Early

49 J. L. Main and R. Lai, “Reformulating ‘Socially Engaged Buddhism’ as an Analytical Category”, *The Eastern Buddhist* 44 (2013) 2, pp. 1–34.

50 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

51 *Ibid.*, p. 13.

52 Ritzinger, *Anarchy in the Pure Land*, p. 119.

53 P. Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995, p. 4.

54 *Ibid.*, p. 8.

55 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

Chinese Buddhist nationalism was transnational because it was linked to nation-building efforts which were the premise for participating in the global modern system of nation-states. But it was also transnational because from the beginning it was linked to the idea of a transnational pan-Buddhist movement. Taixu had sent some of his students overseas to study in the southern or Theravada tradition,⁵⁶ and also had ambitions to establish a World Buddhist Association (*Shijie fojiao lianhe hui* 世界佛教聯合會).⁵⁷ To this end the reformer travelled to Japan, Europe, and even the US,⁵⁸ and some years later also journeyed to South and Southeast Asia. However, although his attempts ultimately failed, Taixu's promotion of Buddhist contributions to nation-state building, his proximity to the Nationalist party, as well as his vision of a transnational pan-Buddhist association, all demonstrate the importance of a multifaceted transnationalism for the development of early *renjian* Buddhism.

Ashiwa and Wank note that the relationship between religion and the state in China is not a dichotomous one where the state acts as a homogenous entity by exercising control over religion as a passive object. Instead they stress the multiplicity of actors and political processes that together form modern religion in China and emphasize the active role of the non-Western religious elites in the transformation of their religion.⁵⁹ They make a similar point to Main and Lai when they argue for a revised definition of socially-engaged Buddhism. Socially-engaged Buddhism is not just a form of Buddhism that agrees with contemporary Western forms of liberal and leftist activism, but instead constitutes a response to the Western notion of secularization – a response that returns agency to Buddhists who feared to be expelled from the public sphere. Main and Lai argue that socially-engaged Buddhists reject secularization because it disempowers religion by relegating it to the private sphere.⁶⁰ Referring to Talal Asad, they note that secularization is not simply a universal process, but that the notion of the secular itself is linked to the specific spatial and historical context of Europe.⁶¹ *Renjian* Buddhism as a socially-engaged modern religiosity emerged out of this transnational reorganization of China.

56 J. Ritzinger, "Original Buddhism and Its Discontents: The Chinese Buddhist Exchange Monks and the Search for the Pure Dharma in Ceylon", *Journal of Chinese Religions* 44 (2016) 2, pp. 149–173.

57 Pittman, *Toward a Modern Chinese Buddhism*, p. 106.

58 Ibid., pp. 118–129.

59 Y. Ashiwa and D. L. Wank, "Introduction", in: Ashiwa and Wank (eds.), *Making Religion, Making the State*, pp. 3–5, 7.

60 Main and Lai, "Reformulating 'Socially Engaged Buddhism' as an Analytical Category", p. 4.

61 Ibid., p. 19.

Social engagement as religious practice in the early period thus served a double purpose: it protected Buddhism from encroachment by the state, while at the same time extending the space of Buddhism in society by expanding into the newly established secular sphere. *Renjian* Buddhism is intrinsically modern not because it is necessarily socially progressive or because it is linked to modern forms of Buddhist religiosities as they are practiced in the West,⁶² but because it emerges out of the multifaceted transnational linkages and exchanges between China and the West that in their totality form China as a modern nation-state. *Renjian* Buddhism is not the only modern Buddhist religiosity that has emerged out of this configuration. Other examples are the Republican Era revival of Yogacara philosophy among Chinese intellectuals⁶³ and the related modern transnationalism of Avatamsaka or Huayan (華嚴) Buddhism,⁶⁴ the development and prevalence of new forms of Chinese lay Buddhism,⁶⁵ but also more recent phenomena such as the reinvention of esoteric Buddhism.⁶⁶

The key tenets of early *renjian* Buddhism – the promotion of Buddhist civic engagements such as education in order to contribute to the nation-state, pan-Buddhist visions, the renegotiation of the secular-religious divide – all emerged from multifaceted transnational linkages and exchanges that mark the era of colonial modernity. It is the transnationalism of colonial modernity, which was initiated by the globalization project of European colonialism that is both a prerequisite for and also inherent in early *renjian* Buddhism. Yet, compared to the contemporary transnationalism of Fo Guang Shan, early *renjian* Buddhist transnationalism was less characterized by actual border-crossings of its adherents (although they did take place) and mainly played out within the borders of China.

⁶² Main and Lai, in a footnote, describe Buddhism as private spirituality and the focus on scientific verifiability of the effects of meditation of the mindfulness movement as two more Western examples of modern Buddhist religiosities. *Ibid.*, p. 5, footnote 10.

⁶³ Makeham, “Introduction”, p. 1.

⁶⁴ E. J. Hammerstrom, “Avatamsaka 華嚴: Transnationalism in Modern Sinitic Buddhism”, *Journal of Global Buddhism* 17 (2016), p. 65.

⁶⁵ Jessup, “Buddhist Activism, Urban Space, and Ambivalent Modernity in 1920s Shanghai”.

⁶⁶ C. Bahir, “Buddhist Master Wuguang’s (1918–2000) Taiwanese Web of the Colonial, Exilic and Han”, *The e-Journal of East and Central Asian Religions* 1 (2013), pp. 81–93; C. Bahir, “Replanting the Bodhi Tree: Buddhist Sectarianism and Zhenyan Revivalism”, *Pacific World* 20 (2018), pp. 95–129.

Shifting the Centre of Modern Chinese Mahayana

Taixu passed away in 1947, two years before the foundation of the People's Republic. During the first years of the PRC, progressive Buddhists continued to use core concepts of *renjian* Buddhism in order to reconcile their tradition with the new political climate.⁶⁷ However, the following decades were to become the most challenging period for Buddhism in the modern history of China.⁶⁸ It would take until the end of the Mao period for Buddhism to begin to recover in the PRC.⁶⁹ *Renjian* Buddhism, albeit understood quite differently than in Taiwan, was to become an important concept on the mainland again. Reinvented by long-time president of the Buddhist Association of China Zhao Puchu, *renjian* Buddhism gained a Marxist meaning linked to the political ideology of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).⁷⁰

Foreseeing difficulties, many of the monastics who had strived for the modernization of Buddhism during the Republican Era followed the retreating KMT troops to Taiwan. The island, which was governed by the Chinese Nationalist party until its democratization in the 1990s, was to become the centre of the next phase of *renjian* Buddhism. Buddhism on the island has a very complex and multifaceted history. Its two most remarkable characteristics are the vitality

67 X. Yu, "Buddhist Efforts for the Reconciliation of Buddhism and Marxism in the Early Years of the People's Republic of China", in: Kiely and Jessup (eds.), *Recovering Buddhism in Modern China*, p. 194; 199. For a study on Buddhism in China during the Mao Era, see H. Welch, *Buddhism under Mao*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972.

68 See for example, J. Kiely, "The Communist Dismantling of Temple and Monastic Buddhism in Suzhou", in: Kiely and Jessup (eds.), *Recovering Buddhism in Modern China*, pp. 79–110; Yu, "Buddhist Efforts for the Reconciliation of Buddhism and Marxism".

69 For studies on contemporary Buddhism in the PRC, see R. Birnbaum, "Buddhist China at the Century's Turn", *The China Quarterly* 174 (2003), pp. 428–450; Ji Z., "Secularization as Religious Restructuring: Statist Institutionalization of Chinese Buddhism and Its Paradoxes", in: Yang (ed.), *Chinese Religiosities*, pp. 233–260; G. Fisher, "Morality Books and the Regrowth of Buddhism in China", in: A. Y. Chau (ed.), *Religion in Contemporary China: Revitalization and Innovation*, pp. 53–80; Ji Z., "Buddhism in the Reform Era: A Secularized Revival?", *ibid.*, pp. 32–52; G. Fisher, *From Comrades to Bodhisattvas: Moral Dimensions of Lay Buddhist Practice in Contemporary China*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2014; G. Fisher, "Mapping Religious Difference: Lay Buddhist Textual Communities in the Post-Mao Period", in: Kiely and Jessup (eds.), *Recovering Buddhism in Modern China*, pp. 257–290; N. T.-C. Cheung, "'Receiving Prayer Beads': A Lay-Buddhist Ritual Performed by Menopausal Women in Ninghua, Western Fujian", *ibid.*, pp. 291–332; B. Vermander, L. Hingley, and L. Zhang, *Shanghai Sacred: The Religious Landscape of a Global City*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2018; Z. Ji, G. Fisher, and A. Laliberté (eds.), *Buddhism after Mao: Negotiations, Continuities, and Reinventions*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2019.

70 Z. Ji, "Zhao Puchu and His Renjian Buddhism", *The Eastern Buddhist* 44 (2013) 2, p. 42.

of the female sangha and the emergence of *renjian* Buddhist mass organizations such as Dharma Drum Mountain, Tzu Chi, and Fo Guang Shan. Although these groups are far from being the only Buddhist organizations in Taiwan, they are surely the most visible. They are involved in many aspects of society, ranging from the media, charity, and education, to politics.⁷¹ Stefania Travagnin suggests a taxonomy of principles and practices of Taiwanese *renjian* Buddhism: They include the development of modern Buddhist seminaries; enhanced involvement in the public sphere; enhanced interaction between laity and monastics; the use of modern communication technology; a pan-Buddhist and inter-religious perspective; transnationalism; and the importance of the above-mentioned doctrinal notion of a pure land on earth.⁷² I would add the introduction of modern methods for managing the sangha to that list.

The point of most interest for this study is the new mode of transnationalism of the Buddhist mass organizations. These organizations are not only active in Taiwan but have spread around the globe. This is true of Tzu Chi and Fo Guang Shan in particular, which despite their different approaches – Tzu Chi is a religious charity and Fo Guang Shan is a Buddhist order in a more customary sense – maintain a high degree of transnationalism.⁷³ Transnational development was not a new phenomenon in Chinese Buddhism. In the second half of the nineteenth century many Chinese emigrated to Southeast Asia and later to North America. After a time some of them invited Buddhist monastics to follow them.⁷⁴ The first Buddhist linked to the *renjian* Buddhist reform project in Southeast Asia was Cihang (慈航, 1893–1954), who settled in Malaysia for some

71 For their involvement in politics and charity undertakings, see Laliberté, *The Politics of Buddhist Organizations in Taiwan*; A. Laliberté, “Religious Philanthropy in China, Taiwan and Hong Kong”, *Asian Journal of Social Science* 43 (2015) 4, pp. 435–465.

72 S. Travagnin, “Genealogy and Taxonomy of the ‘Twentieth-century Renjian Fojiao 人間佛教’: Mapping a Famen 法門 from Mainland China and Taiwan to Europe”, *Renjian fojiao xuebao yuwen 人間佛教學報藝文* 9 (2017), pp. 182–183.

73 On Tzu Chi, see C. J. Huang, “The Compassion Relief Diaspora”, in: L. Learman (ed.), *Buddhist Missionaries in the Era of Globalization*, Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2005, pp. 185–209; W. Huang, “Buddhists in Action: Transnational Migration and Religious Cosmopolitanism”, *Encounters* 4 (2011), pp. 215–239; W. Huang, “The Discourse and Practice of a Buddhist Cosmopolitanism: Transnational Migrants and Tzu Chi Movement”, in: M. Rovisco and S. C. H. Kim (eds.), *Cosmopolitanism, Religion and the Public Sphere*, London: Routledge, 2014, pp. 15–31; A. Laliberté, “The Growth of a Taiwanese Buddhist Association in China: Soft Power and Institutional Learning”, *China Information* 27 (2013) 1, pp. 81–105.

74 Y. Ashiwa and D. L. Wank, “The Globalization of Chinese Buddhism: Clergy and Devotee Networks in the Twentieth Century”, *International Journal of Asian Studies* 2 (2005) 2, p. 223.

years in the 1940s before moving to Taiwan.⁷⁵ Another important figure of the movement, Yen Pei 演培 (1917–1996), moved from Taiwan to Singapore in 1964,⁷⁶ where he became a key figure in the reformation of Buddhism in the city state.⁷⁷ The transnationalism of the big *renjian* Buddhist groups differs from these earlier examples. The global success of Taiwanese *renjian* Buddhist groups such as Fo Guang Shan and Tzu Chi is connected to the dynamics of post-1965 ethnic Chinese migration.

The Globalization Project of Fo Guang Shan

Fo Guang Shan founder Hsing Yun was born Li Guoshen (李國深) in Jiangsu Province, China in 1927.⁷⁸ He grew up in a small town during the turmoil of the Republican Era. In 1938, he was tonsured at Qixia Temple (*Qixia si* 棲霞寺) under the monastic Zhikai (志開 1911–1979) and received the Dharma names Wuche (悟徹) and Jinjue (今覺). After relocating to Taiwan, he chose the name Hsing Yun, and is known by that name today. In 1941, Hsing Yun received full ordination. Three years later, Hsing Yun began studying at Tianning Temple (*Tianning si* 天寧寺) in Changzhou (常州). One year later, he transferred to Jiaoshan Seminary (*Jiaoshan foxueyuan* 焦山佛學院), where he first encountered Taixu's modernist Buddhist thought. In 1947, Hsing Yun spent a short period of time at the ancestral temple of his master – Da Jue Temple, the temple that is also a part of this ethnographic study – where he served as the principal of an elementary school and also became involved in writing and publishing. In 1949, he followed the KMT troops with a monastic relief group to Keelung (*Jilong* 基隆) in Taiwan. After his arrival, he found shelter at Yuanguang Temple (*Yuanguang si* 圓光寺) in Taoyuan (桃園). The temple and its associated Buddhist seminary, the first one in Taiwan, were under the leadership of the above-mentioned Cihang. Cihang was another student of Taixu who had studied at the famous Minnan Buddhist seminary (*Minnan foxue yuan* 閩南佛學院).⁷⁹ After his

75 J. M.-T. Chia, *Monks in Motion: Buddhism and Modernity Across the South China Sea*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2020, p. 63.

76 Ibid., p. 149.

77 Ibid., chapter 4.

78 The following brief biography of Hsing Yun is based on Shi Ruchang 釋如常, Shi Miaoguang 釋妙廣, and Shi Manyi 釋滿義 (eds.), *Yunshui Sanqian – Xingyun dashi hongfa 50 nian jinian yingxiang zhuanji* 雲水三千 – 星雲大師弘法50年紀念影像專輯, Kaohsiung: Foguangshan wenjiao jijinhui 佛光山文教基金會, 2003, pp. 632–633.

79 C. B. Jones, *Buddhism in Taiwan: Religion and the State, 1660–1990*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999, pp. 102–105.

arrival in Taiwan, Hsing Yun also resumed his writing and publishing activities. In 1951, he relocated to Yilan (宜蘭), where he began to accept monastic disciples. In the following years, he would attract many more followers with his charisma and creative modes of Dharma propagation. In 1963, Hsing Yun went on his first overseas tour as part of an official Buddhist delegation to Southeast Asia. In the mid-1960s, Hsing Yun left northern Taiwan, the centre of the island's Buddhist establishment at the time. He moved to the southern county of Kaohsiung, where he founded Fo Guang Shan in 1967. When founding his order, Hsing Yun stated its four main directives, known as the Four Guidelines of Fo Guang Shan (*Foguangshan de zongzhi* 佛光山的宗旨), which refer to the order's four main fields of engagement: cultural activities, education, charity, and religious cultivation.⁸⁰ To this day, these directives are reflected in the order's internal bureaucratic structure and describe the main areas of involvement of Fo Guang Shan.

Since its founding in the 1960s, Fo Guang Shan has developed into one of the biggest Buddhist orders in Taiwan. Dedicated to its ideal of bringing Buddhism into the world, the order has become involved in many areas of society. In addition to Fo Guang Shan, Hsing Yun also founded the Buddha's Light International Association (BLIA). Not long after its establishment in Taiwan, the BLIA's headquarters moved to Hsi Lai Temple in the US.⁸¹ The BLIA, now a UN-registered NGO, is often referred to by its members as the lay wing of Fo Guang Shan.⁸² The majority of the organization's membership are indeed lay members, but membership is also open to monastics. BLIA members pay an annual fee and pledge allegiance to the BLIA articles. They are also expected to participate regularly in the organization's activities, in exchange for which they receive certain privileges, such as the right to request the presence of a monastic for a chanting service on certain occasions or the right to stay at one of the order's dormitories.⁸³ It is important to keep in mind that the development of associations with committed memberships is a modern phenomenon in Chinese Buddhism. Besides the deep commitment of BLIA membership, there are also more traditional ways to be engaged at Fo Guang Shan. Some people just come as casual temple visitors, while others may take refuge in the three jewels at Fo Guang Shan or participate in one

⁸⁰ Foguangshan zongwu weiyuanhua (ed.), *Foguangshan kaishan sishi zhounian jinian tekan*, vol. 1, p. 13.

⁸¹ Chandler, *Establishing a Pure Land on Earth*, p. 192.

⁸² Laliberté, *The Politics of Buddhist Organizations in Taiwan*, p. 143, footnote 27.

⁸³ Chandler, *Establishing a Pure Land on Earth*, p. 193.

of the many activities. They may even become benefactors (*gongdezhu* 功德主) by contributing to the temple through outstanding deeds or regular donations.⁸⁴

The following section will discuss some key issues that are connected to Fo Guang Shan's globalization project. Although Fo Guang Shan might be the most visible, the order is not the only Chinese Mahayana Buddhist organization that has developed transnationally. Other examples of Chinese Buddhist transnationalism are Tiantai (天台) lineage networks that predate or parallel the global development of Fo Guang Shan. These groups are characterized by a more decentralized and fluid pattern of transnationalism that is based on the religious kinship relationships of multiple lineage holders.⁸⁵ In contrast, Fo Guang Shan's transnationalism is characterised by the order's hierarchical and centralised structure, the incorporation of modern management methods, a highly developed collective identity, and the systematic and institutionalized incorporation of the laity.

As of 2015, Fo Guang Shan maintained 199 temples and practice centres worldwide, 75 of which were located in Taiwan.⁸⁶ In addition, the order maintained 48 temples and practice centres in other Asian countries, six of which were in Japan, one in South Korea, 20 in Malaysia, one in Singapore, five in the Philippines, two in Thailand, two in India, three in Hong Kong, and eight in the People's Republic of China. Due to the latter's restrictive policies towards religious organizations, most of the Fo Guang Shan facilities in the PRC are cultural centres. Six of all overseas temples and practice centres in Asia were constructed in the 1980s, 23 in the 1990s, and 18 since 2000. All eight facilities of the order in the PRC were constructed after 2007.⁸⁷ The order runs 40 temples and practice centres in the Americas, the majority of which are in the North America (including Central America). Twenty-five are located in the USA, six in Canada, one in Costa Rica, four in Brazil, two in Paraguay, one in Argentina, and one in Chile. Of these, 6 were constructed in the 1980s, 23 in the 1990s, and eleven in the 2000s. Of the most recent batch of temples, almost all were built in the early 2000s, apart from the Bodhi Temple (*Puti si* 菩提寺) in Sacramento, which was built in 2009.⁸⁸ In Europe, the order maintains 14 temples and practice centres in ten countries. Nine of them were constructed in the 1990s and

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 192.

⁸⁵ Ashiwa and Wank, "The Globalization of Chinese Buddhism," pp. 226–234; R. Lai, "Tiantai Transnationalism: Mobility, Identity, and Lineage Networks in Modern Chinese Buddhism", in: Clart and Jones (eds.), *Transnational Religious Spaces*, pp. 222–223.

⁸⁶ Shi Yongdong, *Renjian fojiao shijie zhanwang*, p. 79.

⁸⁷ Ibid., pp. 169–172.

⁸⁸ Ibid., pp. 174–176.

five since 2000. Two are located in France, two in Germany, two in the UK, two in Switzerland, one in Sweden, one in the Netherlands, one in Belgium, one in Austria, one in Spain, and one in Portugal.⁸⁹ In Oceania, Fo Guang Shan has 14 temples and practice centres, including eleven in Australia, two in New Zealand, and one in Papua New Guinea. The first one was built in 1989, ten in the 1990s, and three since 2000.⁹⁰ Finally, the order runs eight temples and practice centres in Africa, six of which are located in South Africa. The others are in Lesotho and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The South African temples and centres were all built in the 1990s, the remaining two in the 2000s.⁹¹

Fo Guang Shan's overseas development began in the US. Although, as discussed in the previous chapter, Hsing Yun's earliest efforts to develop a presence in the US date back to the 1970s, we can see from the list above that Fo Guang Shan's transnational spread did not really gather pace until the late 1980s and reached its peak in the 1990s. Construction of 71 of the order's 124 overseas temples and practice centres was completed in the 1990s. The country with the most overseas temples is the USA (25 temples), followed by Malaysia (20 temples).⁹² These numbers correspond with Chandler's observation that wherever there is a sizable Taiwanese diaspora community we can find a Fo Guang Shan temple.⁹³ As we will see in the next chapter, the late 1980s and the 1990s were also the time when large numbers of Taiwanese emigrated and their most popular destination was the USA. However, since the turn of the millennium this situation has changed. Temple construction has continued, but the focus for new development has shifted back to Asia, where it is the People's Republic of China that has become the new centre of the order's overseas development. Yet if we compare the situation at the order's facilities in the PRC with those in other overseas countries, we can see a significant difference. The majority of people, monastic and lay, one encounters at most overseas Fo Guang Shan temples are Taiwanese. In the PRC, however, despite the existence of a large overseas Taiwanese community, Fo Guang Shan facilities target the local population (see Figure 4).⁹⁴ This new attention given to the PRC also corresponds with enhanced attempts to attract a steadily growing PRC overseas community in the diaspora.

⁸⁹ Ibid., pp. 177–178.

⁹⁰ Ibid., pp. 179–180.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 181.

⁹² For a study on Fo Guang Shan in Malaysia, see Wong and Levitt, "Travelling Faiths and Migrant Religions", particularly pp. 356–358.

⁹³ S. Chandler, "Spreading Buddha's Light: The Internationalization of Foguang Shan", in: Learman (ed.), *Buddhist Missionaries in the Era of Globalization*, p. 165.

⁹⁴ Observation based on ethnographic fieldwork.



Figure 4: Chinese Participating in a Great Compassion Repentance, Main Shrine of Da Jue Temple, PRC.

How does Fo Guang Shan finance its vast global net of temples and practice centres? Fo Guang Shan temples are expected to be financially independent and not rely on central funding. In practice, however, that is not always possible. If a temple struggles financially, the headquarters may step in or initiate donation campaigns to organize support. In addition, regional headquarters sometimes have to support associated local temples and practice centres in order to contribute to the spread of the Dharma. Conventionally, most Buddhist temples in Taiwan rely for their income on money or real estate donations, Dharma assemblies, the sale of Buddhist paraphernalia, funeral related services, and chanting services. Fo Guang Shan has diversified its sources of revenue. In addition to the above, the order runs two publishing companies, a number of museums and arts centres, a TV station, a daily newspaper, child care centres, a travel agency, a chain of teahouses, lodging for pilgrims, hotels, the massive Fo Guang Shan Buddha Museum complex with its many restaurants and shops, and a trust fund. Furthermore, it can count on a free labour force of about 1300 monastics and countless volunteers.⁹⁵ Compared to those in

⁹⁵ Shi Yongdong, *Renjian fojiao shijie zhanwang*, p. 104.

Taiwan, the order's overseas temples have to rely on a more limited range of temple revenues, such as financial or real estate donations as previously mentioned, Dharma assemblies, the sale of Buddhist paraphernalia, funeral related services, chanting services, and membership fees. Yet there are other sources of revenue, such as the Buddha's Light Publishing Company at Hsi Lai Temple, several museums, Chinese language schools, child care centres, overseas branches of the order's chain of teahouses, lodgings for pilgrims, and renting out plots of land. Most of these target members of the ethnic Chinese overseas communities, who represent the vast majority of those involved at the temples. The order also generates income through English language activities, such as meditation classes for a fee or donations.⁹⁶ As is the case in Taiwan, Fo Guang Shan temples overseas can rely on a labour force comprising monastics and volunteers, albeit to a lesser degree.

When it comes to levels of involvement at overseas temples, how should membership numbers be best assessed? The question is difficult to answer, since it depends on how one defines membership. One option would be to define temple membership as being a member of the BLIA. As of 2013, the BLIA claims 200 chapters and over a thousand subchapters with a total membership of over two million.⁹⁷ As will be discussed in the next chapter, the majority of its members overseas are ethnic Chinese from Taiwan, Southeast Asia, and Hong Kong, and increasingly the PRC. However, many regions also run a local-language BLIA subchapter. The situation is different in the PRC, since the BLIA is not allowed to operate in the country. Furthermore, it is important to keep in mind that membership at Fo Guang Shan is not necessarily exclusive.⁹⁸ In some places, such as South Africa, many members of Fo Guang Shan also support Tzu Chi or the Amitofo Care Centre (*Amitufo guanhuai zhongxin* 阿彌陀佛關懷中心), a charity founded by a former Fo Guang Shan monastic who has left the order. In Taiwan or places with big overseas Taiwanese communities, people tend to choose to be involved in one group. However, this applies only to full BLIA members who strongly identify with Fo Guang Shan. Many people also participate in temple activities without being formal members. In fact, membership, although appreciated, is not required for participation in most if not all of the order's activities. Thus, the vast majority of daily temple visitors are not BLIA members.

⁹⁶ Ibid., pp. 213–214.

⁹⁷ Shi Miaoguang, "Issues of Acculturation and Globalization Faced by the Fo Guang Shan Buddhist Order", p. 546.

⁹⁸ The following information is based on fieldwork data.

One of the main assets facilitating the order's global development are its roughly 1300 monastics. Fo Guang Shan's education system has specifically adjusted to its global trajectory. The order founded an English-language Buddhist seminary as early as 1976.⁹⁹ In 1989, Fo Guang Shan also established a Japanese-language Buddhist seminary¹⁰⁰ and in 1994, it established a class specifically for monastics with a foreign nationality.¹⁰¹ Over the years, ethnic Chinese from places such as Malaysia, Indonesia, and Hong Kong have joined the order.¹⁰² Many of them have excellent English skills and are therefore stationed overseas. The "human resources office" (*Chuandeng hui* 傳燈會) at the headquarters suggests work locations for the monastics based on the needs of the order and the interests and skills of the particular monastic. In theory, monastics are supposed to rotate their posts after a period of three years. However, overseas this practice turned out to be impracticable. Because of their language abilities, and also due to the visa laws and regulations of specific countries, monastics who are stationed overseas tend to rotate significantly less.

As will be discussed in the following chapter in more detail, Fo Guang Shan's global trajectory is inextricably linked to the patterns of post-1965 ethnic Chinese migration. However, the order has always aimed to attract non-ethnic Chinese. At most overseas temples, we can find meditation groups conducted in English or the local language. At Fo Guang Shan, the Chinese term for internationalisation (*guojihua* 國際化) is sometimes used to describe the order's global trajectory. This is then juxtaposed with the concept of localisation (*bentuhua* 本土化) to describe the order's efforts in cross-cultural proselytization. *Bentuhua* is sometimes also used to describe the development of *renjian* Buddhism in Taiwan. Within this usage it refers to the process of Chinese Buddhism adapting to the society and culture of Taiwan.¹⁰³ In 2001, when the third global meeting of BLIA members (*Guoji foguanghui sanjie diyici lishi huiyi* 國際佛光會第三屆第一次理事會議) was convened at Nan Hua Temple, Hsing Yun emphasized the need for Fo Guang Shan to localise overseas. He offered a long-term perspective for this goal and elaborated on four relevant aspects of this endeavour.¹⁰⁴ Elsewhere, we find

⁹⁹ Foguanshan zongwu weiyuanhui (ed.), *Foguanshan kaishan sishi zhounian jinian tekan*, vol. 3, p. 78.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 80.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 82.

¹⁰² The data presented in the following section is based on fieldwork data.

¹⁰³ Laliberté and Travagnin, "Epistemic Communities of Buddhist Scholarship in Modern China", in: Laliberté and Travagnin (eds.), *Concepts and Methods for the Study of Chinese Religions*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019, p. 123.

¹⁰⁴ Shi Miaoyi, "Cong Xingyun dashi bentuhua linian kan Fuguang quanqiu hongfa zhi wenhua shiying ji chengxiao", pp. 506–508.

Hsing Yun's thought on localisation condensed into five main points.¹⁰⁵ However, whether divided into four or five points, the content is very similar. Hsing Yun stresses openness and cultural flexibility, the use of local languages, the idea to add on options instead of restraints, and the long-term goal to have non-Chinese local monastics and even abbots to take over. Yet his plan seems difficult to accomplish on the ground. Although overseas temples make some adjustments to accommodate non-ethnic Chinese temple visitors – Fo Guang Shan, for example, does not expect non-Chinese who want to become more involved with the temple to reject their original religion or do full prostrations when entering the Buddha hall – non-ethnic Chinese Fo Guang Shan Buddhists represent a small minority, and there are just a handful of non-ethnic Chinese monastics in the order. With one exception – a New Zealander who served as one of four vice-abbots at the headquarters – so far no non-Chinese has served as an abbot at a Fo Guang Shan temple. A series of articles written by senior nuns who have served overseas for many years, if not decades, discuss the issue in more depth. According to their observations, one of the main reasons for the slow development of cross-cultural proselytization are language issues and cultural differences.¹⁰⁶

The present study adopts an alternative framework to the dichotomy of internationalisation and localisation to examine the order's globalization project. By examining Fo Guang Shan's global trajectory through a spatial lens that considers the particularities of one specific example of a modern Buddhist religiosity, I want to avoid an oversimplifying bifurcation between Chinese and non-Chinese. Instead I aim to highlight the internal complexity and many overlaps that exist between the different groups, ethnic Chinese and others, who are involved at Fo Guang Shan's temples overseas. Thus, though the main focus of this study is on first-generation ethnic Chinese migrants, this group is far from being homogenous. It is important not only to acknowledge the layers and fractures within the Chinese diaspora, comprising for example national and geographic origin, socio-economic class and gender, etc., but also to take into consideration the dynamics of second and third generation migrants who

105 The five points are: (1) native born abbot for native temple; (2) the legitimacy of paying equal devotion to two religious beliefs; (3) additional options are better than reduced choice; (4) teach what is new to locals in their language; (5) incorporating the spirit of respect, tolerance, peace, and equality. See Shi Miaoguang, "Issues of Acculturation and Globalization Faced by the Fo Guang Shan Buddhist Order", pp. 547–558.

106 See, for example Shi Manju, "Renjian fojiao quanqiu honghua wenti luelun", pp. 491–493; Shi Miaoyi, "Cong Xingyun dashi bentuhua linian kan Foguang quanqiu hongfa zhi wenhua shiying ji chengxiao", pp. 533–535; Shi Miaoyi, "Cong 'Bolin Foguangshan dewen zu' kan Deguo hongfa chengxiao ji fojiao bentuhua", p. 665.

might possess multiple, hybrid, or even non-Chinese ethnic identities. These issues touch on the question of who or what is “Chinese” and the meaning of “Chineseness” in general. Can we still think of first-generation migrants as “Chinese”, when some of them have lived in their new home country since the late 1970s and, though still fluent in Mandarin, are culturally in many ways more, for example, American than Chinese? What about those who have emigrated from Taiwan and who might identify, for example, not as Chinese but as Taiwanese American? What about the second generation? Are they, in the South African case, to be considered African, African Born Chinese, Hong Kongese African, or all of the above? Furthermore, the societies that ethnic Chinese are migrating into are far from being culturally homogenous and static. Countries such as the US, South Africa, Australia, or the countries of Europe are undergoing significant transformations in their ethnic composition bringing increased diversity into their cultures. It is thus important to be careful not to hastily reify ethnicity as a category of research but instead to be attentive of the complexity of the dynamics that play out on the ground.